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the weekly Standard

FEBRUARY 5, 2001

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Bill Clinton's Last Booty Call

In order to move out of the White House in style (and not violate Hillary's Senate gift limit), the Clintons rattled their begging bowls last year, and their friends came through. The following is the itemized list attached to Schedule B of Bill Clinton's financial disclosure form, filed January 19, the day before he left office. The form specifies: "This list includes gifts received over the last eight years, but which were not accepted by the Clintons until last year. No reportable gifts were accepted in 2001."

Ms. Barbara Allen, Belfast, Northern Ireland. $650. Watercolor of the Clinton ancestral homestead.

Georgetown University Alumni Class of 1968. $38,000. Dale Chihuly basket set.

Mr. Arthur Athis, Los Angeles. $2,400. Dining chairs.

Dr. Dendez Badarch, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. $1,300. Two drawings of Mongolian landscapes.

Mr. Robert Berks, Orient, N.Y. $2,500. Bust of President Truman.

Mr. Bruce Bernson, Santa Barbara, Calif. $300. Golf putter.

Mr. and Mrs. Bill Brandt, Winnetka, Ill. $5,000. China.

Mr. Ken Burns, Walpole, N.H. $800. Photograph of Duke Ellington.

Mr. Ely Callaway, Carlsbad, Calif. $499. Golf driver.

Ms. Iris Cantor, New York. $4,992. China.

Ms. Robin Carnahan and Ms. Nina Ganci, St. Louis, Mo. $340. Two sweaters.

Glen Eden Carpets, Calhoun, Ga. $6,282. Two carpets.

Mr. Dale Chihuly, Seattle. $22,000. Dale Chihuly glass sculpture.

Ms. Colette D'Etremont, New Brunswick, Canada. $300. Flatware.

Ms. Mary Steenburgen and Mr. Ted Danson, Los Angeles. $4,787. China.

Mr. Dennis Doucette, Coral Gables, Fla. $310. Golf bag, shirt, canvas bag, and book.

Ronald and Beth Dozoretz, Washington, D.C. $7,000. Dining table, server, and golf club.

Mr. Martin Patrick Evans, Chicago. $5,000. Rug.

Lee Ficks, Cincinnati. $3,650. Kitchen table and four chairs.

Lynn Forester, New York. $1,353. Cashmere sweater.

Mr. Paul Goldenberg, La Habra, Calif. $2,993. Televisions and DVD player.

Myra Greenspun, Green Valley, Nev. $1,588. Flatware.

Vinad Gupta, Omaha. $450. Leather jacket.

Mr. Richard C. Helmstetter, Carlsbad, Calif. $524. Golf driver and golf balls.

Mr. Hal Hunnicutt, Conway, Ark. $360. Golf irons.

Ms. Ghada Irani, Los Angeles. $4,944. Flatware.

Jill and Ken Iscol, Pound Ridge, N.Y. $2,110. China and a jacket.

Mr. and Mrs. Walter Kaye, New York. $9,683. Travel humidor, china cabinet, chandelier, and a copy of President Lincoln's Cooper Union Speech.

Mr. David Kilgarriff, North Yorkshire, United Kingdom of Great Britain. $300. Golf driver.

Mr. Bill Knapp, West Des Moines, Iowa. $2,500. Painting titled "Flag With Heart."

Mr. Steve Leutkehans, Morton Grove, Ill. $650. Golf clubs.

Mr. David Martinous, Little Rock. $1,000. Needlepoint rug.

Mr. Steve Mittman, New York. $19,900. Two sofas, an easy chair, and an ottoman.

Mr. Katsuhiro Miura, Hyogo-Ken, Japan. $500. Golf driver.

Mrs. Jan Munro, Sarasota, Fla. $650. Painting of New York City.

Mr. Jack Nicholson, Beverly Hills, Calif. $350. Golf driver.

Mr. Brad Noe, High Point, N.C. $2,843. Sofa.

Ms. Margaret O'Leary, San Francisco. $595. Pantsuit and sweater.

Mr. and Mrs. Joe Panko, Concord, N.C. $300. Three golf putters.

Mr. and Mrs. Paolo Papini, Florence, Italy. $425. Italian leather box.

Mr. and Mrs. Morris Pynoos, Beverly Hills, Calif. $5,767. Cashmere shawl and flatware.

Mr. Brian B. Ready, Chappaqua, N.Y. $300. Painting of Buddy.

Ms. Denise Rich, New York. $7,375. Two coffee tables and two chairs.

Sgt. David Rowland, Springfield, Ill. $500. 1934 check signed by Harry Truman.

Mr. Stuart Shiller, Hialeah, Fla. $1,170. Lamps.

Mr. and Mrs. Steven Spielberg, Universal City, Calif. $4,920. China.

Mr. Sylvester Stallone, Miami. $300. Boxing gloves.

Mr. and Mrs. Vo Viet Thanh, Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. $350. Framed tapestry.

Ms. Joan Tumpson, Miami. $3,000. Painting.

Mrs. Edith Wasserman, Beverly Hills, Calif. $4,967. Flatware.

Mr. and Mrs. Allen Whiting, West Tisbury, Mass. $300. Painting titled "Oyster Pond."

The Honorable James Lee Witt, Alexandria, Va. $450. Cowboy boot.

Mr. and Mrs. Bud Yorkin, Los Angeles. $500. Antique book on President Washington.

Total value: $190,027 ♦

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Scrapbook

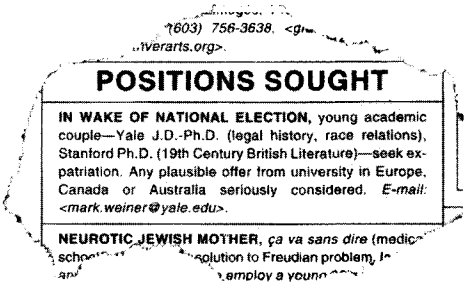
Fraud, Waste, and Abuse

Senior Airman Lenyatta Tinnelle, court-martialed at Naval Air Station Keflavik in Iceland, has been sentenced to a month's hard labor, two months of restricted activities, and a reduction in rank, the Associated Press reports. Tinnelle had written dozens of bad checks to sustain a compulsive year-long gambling binge that cost her $28,000.

No word yet on what will happen to the bookmaking operation (the Pentagon) that got Airman Tinnelle hooked and then took all her money. According to the AP, uniformed personnel and civilian Pentagon employees dropped $1.2 billion worth of their paychecks into 8,000 slot machines at 94 U.S. military installations around the world in 1999. THE SCRAPBOOK figures it will be both conservative and compassionate for our new president to wipe out this vice on military bases for good. ♦

We'll Even Take Them to the Airport

The following classified ad appears on page 50 of the latest *New York Review of Books*: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POSITIONS SOUGHT

IN WAKE OF NATIONAL ELECTION, young academic couple—Yale J.D.-Ph.D. (legal history, race relations), Stanford Ph.D. (19th Century British Literature)—seek expatriation. Any plausible offer from university in Europe, Canada or Australia seriously considered. *E-mail: <mark.weiner@yale.edu>.*

NEUROTIC JEWISH MOTHER, *ça va sans dire* (medic... scho... ...olution to Freudian problem, I... ...employ a young...

THE SCRAPBOOK is curious why young Dr. Weiner, scholar of "race relations," would restrict his search for refuge from America only to those parts of the world ("Europe, Canada, or Australia") dominated by non-Spanish-speaking white people. Perhaps he is actually a Republican? ♦

Johnny Apple's Lost Decade

The proudly epicurean R.W. Apple Jr. of the *New York Times*'s Washington bureau has eaten many a fine meal in his days as a pavement-pounding reporter. Nevertheless, THE SCRAPBOOK bets Apple has never in all those many years tasted so perfectly prepared a dish of crow as was recently served him by his own paper.

On the front page of its January 19 edition, the *Times* ran one of Apple's long "news analyses," this one explaining how John Ashcroft's confirmation hearings reveal that black voters—just between you and me—are disinclined to support President Bush's policies. And on its second page the very next morning, the *Times* ran one of its always illuminating corrections:

"A front-page news analysis article yesterday about the nomination of John Ashcroft as attorney general misidentified the senator who suggested that Mr. Ashcroft had vilified Judge Ronnie White for selfish political ends. It was Richard J. Durbin, Democrat of Illinois, not Alan J. Dixon, who left the Senate in 1993."

Seems like only yesterday, doesn't it? ♦

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Casual

Saab Story

At underground parking garages, I like watching the "valets" gas vehicles up the spiral ramp, weaving around columns and going airborne over grates and speed bumps. But not yesterday, when I saw my own car ascending with a softball-sized patch of pistachio-colored paint next to the headlight, and the plastic belt that secures the bumper flapping about.

An Ethiopian kid hopped out, smiled, and spread his hands, as if to say, "Ta-da!" I'd pressed a dollar absent-mindedly into his palm (showing how little service has to do with tipping) before I said, "Hey, uh . . . "

"Oh . . ." he replied, studying the concrete floor. He wasn't a very good faker.

"Yeah, the, uh . . . bumper."

"Oh, sir. The car was parked next to a pole. Come. I show you." He drove us back down. Generally, this is the sort of thing you have to be drunk to do: *Just smashed my car? Why don't you drive it around a bit more?* We turned the corner of the "orange level," and suddenly we were on a level painted pistachio.

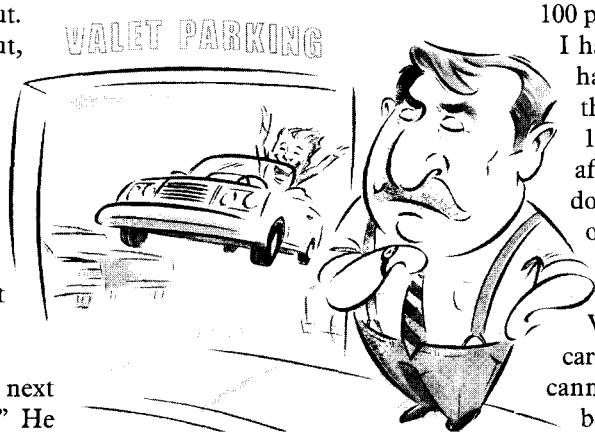
"Hey, stop!" I said. "See? It's the same col—"

"I can fix."

"Well, actually, they'll have to rethread that belt at the dealership."

We were parked by the offending pole. There was a fresh gash in the paint, obviously from my bumper. The guy had really nailed it. Now he leaned across the gearshift and pled: "Oh, please, sir! I ask you please do not to tell my boss. Please!" By laying that decision in my lap, he pretty much wrecked my week.

I'm not a car person. Cars I own tend to acquire nicknames like "The Crate." And this particular one is wholly unsuited to me. It's more a Co-ed Bombshell Accoutrement than a family man's drive-to-work car—a ten-year-old, fire-engine-red Saab my wife bought in her early twenties. It's a turbo-charged SPG, which must be the Swedish acronym for "fitted with an Air Force jet engine." Not to sound like a Beach Boy, but the thing hits 150 mph with no coaxing. BMWs and Mercedes pass it only with my permission.



Darren Gygi

President Clinton's recent pardon of Patty Hearst, strangely enough, reminded me just how the car had wowed me during our dating years. A friend of mine confessed that the photos the Symbionese Liberation Army released after kidnapping Hearst (or to use her exuberantly pornographic *nom de guerre*, "Tanya") had made a never-to-be-effaced erotic impression on his 13-year-old self. "It was the machine gun she was holding," he said. "Know the feeling?" I didn't—but maybe it's like sitting beside the woman you dream of marrying in a car that does 200 if you push it.

Today my wife drives a mini-van, but (or rather, *therefore*) the Saab has mammoth sentimental value. Repairing it is a chore—the parts are so expensive you'd think they were handcrafted out of saffron, chinchilla, and emeralds and brought from Sweden by dogsled—but I do it gladly. My bumper was going to get fixed one way or another, whether I paid for it or the garage did, whether I took it to the dealer or the kid's friends soldered and taped it up in his driveway in Falls Church.

So I told the kid, "Forget about it. I appreciate your honesty."

I didn't really mean it. With *thank-you-sir-thank-you-sir* still ringing in my ears, I drove away feeling terrible, with no idea whether I'd done a good turn or simply been bullied—no idea, in fact, whether I had any moral bearings whatsoever.

It used to be easier. Say the repair costs 500 bucks. If you think of that as 100 pints of Guinness or 30 CDs, then I had done a virtuous thing. But I have children now, and if you think of it as 20 dinosaur books or 10 trips to the zoo (with popsicles after), it looks a bit different, doesn't it? Somerset Maugham once wrote that money is like a sixth sense, without which one cannot enjoy the other five. Well, courage is like an eighth cardinal virtue, without which one cannot practice the other seven. I began to feel like I'd wronged my children just because I'd been too cowardly to face a showdown with some fast-talking immigrant.

I sifted the facts. On the one hand, I've seen the lines of impatient parkers, stomping, looking at their watches, waiting for their cars. Why should the kid suffer because his boss rushed him? On the other hand, I didn't want to collect from the kid, I wanted to collect from his boss. On the other hand, would the boss not understand that, and fire the kid anyway? On the other hand, Ethiopians run most of the parking garages in Washington—maybe the don't-tell-my-boss line was a ruse he'd worked out with his father, who *owns* the place.

I didn't like this line of thinking. I decided to forget about it, and cover the cost by agreeing to do a book review an editor had offered me days before. I called him up and told him it would cost him 20 dinosaur books.

Christopher Caldwell

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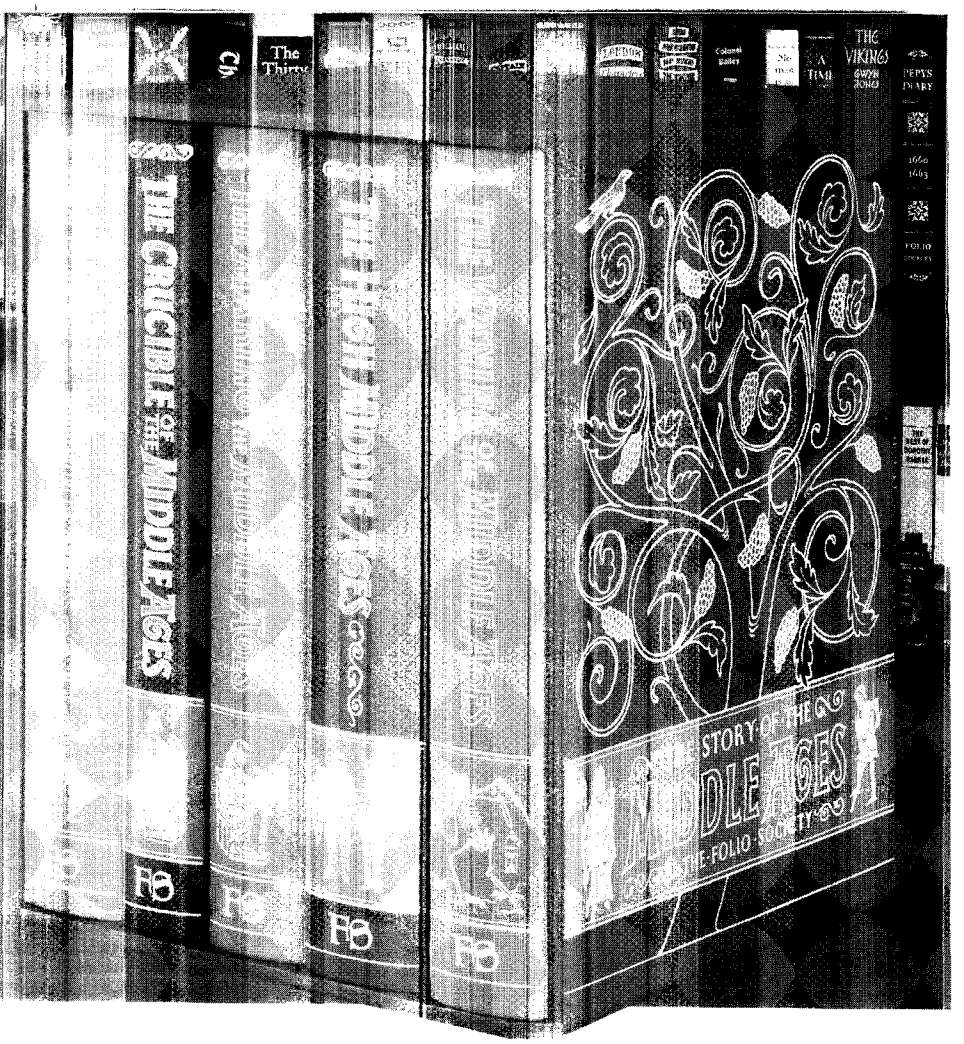

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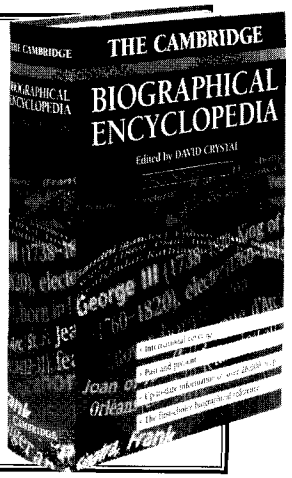

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Paying the Electric Bill

William Tucker's article "From the Golden State to the Blackout State" provides a splendid overview of the energy pricing crisis here in the state of California (Jan. 22). But one small point requires a bit of clarification.

At the end of the article Tucker writes apparently facetiously when he states: "Eventually, the solution to California's energy problems may involve lining the Nevada border with coal plants and pumping electricity to Los Angeles and San Francisco by underground transmission lines."

Just so the governing elites do not take Tucker's future vision literally, power engineers indicate that burying electrical transmission cable underground is limited to lengths of about 1,000 feet, and is very costly. Also, the cable may have to be constantly bathed in a fluid to prevent energy dissipation.

Burying smaller distribution lines around residential neighborhoods is done all the time, however. Here in "La-La Land" politicians may take Tucker's future scenario as a possible solution to the energy problem.

After decades of public and political myopia, the bill for environmentalism is finally coming due; in the form not of lost jobs as many predicted, but of threefold higher energy prices. The elite "leisure class" inflicts this bill on everyone else to preserve its ocean views, smog-free days, non-toxic neighborhoods, and bucolic communities. Politicians sell aesthetics as a public good for consumption to enhance the amenity value of properties and communities. As in any public policy, the question that should be posed is, Who benefits and who pays?

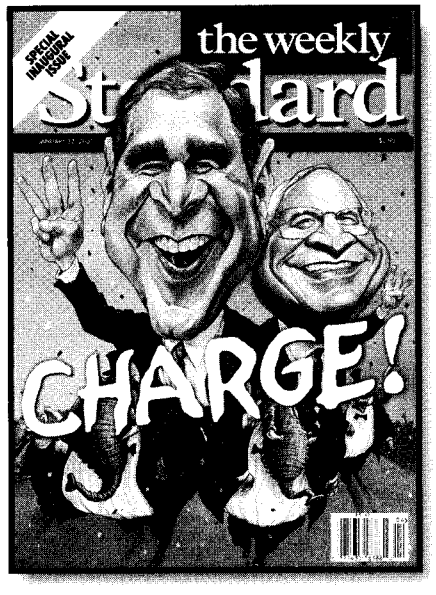
Wayne Lusvardi
Pasadena, CA

The Jazzmen Testify

Diana West's appraisal of Ken Burns's *Jazz* is one of the few truly lucid pieces on the documentary I've read so far ("All That Jazz," Jan. 15). While it's hard to knock any program that has a chance of introducing Americans (particularly young Americans) to a pantheon of great American music and musicians, I, too, have been disappointed at the racial overkill in the series.

Burns may argue that his role is not to provide the definitive history of jazz music, but the fact remains that for millions of people, *Jazz* will be seen as exactly that. It's too bad Burns didn't decide to do a series on American music overall. Then he might have been able to shed some light on the history and origins of equally worthy musical forms—such as rock 'n' roll, country music, popular standards, musical theater, and so on.

Each of these, while encompassing myriad influences both foreign and homegrown, is as uniquely American



(and "artistic") as jazz. But of course, it would have been much more difficult in that kind of program to put such a heavy emphasis on race.

Russell Evansen
Madison, WI

Kudos to Diana West for her incisive critique of Ken Burns's politically correct but otherwise not too well thought out documentary on jazz. I have suffered through three episodes of the program, and I will probably not watch any more.

The key thing to remember is that this documentary was put together by people who are basically social critics and writers, but not musicians. Wynton Marsalis is the obvious exception, of course, but his musicianship and playing ability greatly exceed his experience as an unbiased and researched historian.

I agree that, even given the need to pick and choose for a project of limited space, Burns and company made some weird choices about whom to portray. This doesn't denigrate the talents of Duke Ellington, Armstrong, Goodman, or Billie Holiday. But come on, let's not forget Ella Fitzgerald singing something better than "A-Tisket, A-Tasket," Peggy Lee, Mel Torme, Woody Herman, the Dorseys, Artie Shaw, Charlie Barnet, Jack Teagarden, the Candolis, Charlie Christian, Buddy De Franco, etc. Perhaps the problem is that the subject matter is too vast to be encapsulated or boiled down to the "top ten."

Also, I can say categorically as someone who has been playing jazz for over 60 years that Burns's intellectualization of the jazzman and the choruses he (or she) plays is pure baloney. I'm surprised that Marsalis, such an excellent jazz player, would agree with this foolishness.

I became aware of swing and jazz playing when I was about 10 years old. I thought to myself, "I can do that!" and I just started doing it. I wasn't pouring my soul into anything or telling my life's story, I was just playing jazz! I (and everyone else playing) just listened, imitated, tried out new licks, practiced, and played. Our various efforts led to better styles and sounds. By the time Dizzy Gillespie and Charley Parker came along in the early forties, most musicians considered Armstrong to be kind of corny!

Despite all of Burns's fawning over the genius of jazz players, I recall a comment attributed, ironically, to Louis Armstrong, who once supposedly said, "When it comes to playing jazz, either you got it or you ain't."

Ed Wells
Eau Claire, WI

I was quite pleased to read Diana West's review of Ken Burns's *Jazz*. The other night I was surfing through TV channels when I came across Louis Armstrong and band playing "Stomping at the Savoy." I stopped surfing and watched the documentary to its end.

I was born in 1925 and went to Yale in

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1942. I visited Greenwich Village several times, seeing Miff Mole, Muggsy Spanier, Eddie Condon, et al. I also took in a few of Benny Goodman's performances at the Hotel New Yorker and stopped occasionally at the bars on 52nd Street which featured, among other artists, Art Tatum. This is the kind of jazz I loved in my late teens and early twenties.

I was more than a little turned off by the narrative in *Jazz*. I agree with West's opinion about Burns's apotheosis of Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington. While both of these men made enormous contributions to the musical vernacular of the country, their efforts weren't exactly god-like. I wasn't offended by Burns's documentary, but since I lived through the time period in question and am still quite taken by the jazz idiom of that time, I'm glad to see my disappointment echoed by West.

DAVID E. CONNOR
Peoria, IL

DIANA WEST IS ON TARGET in her view of Ken Burns and jazz. Burns skews culture and history to advance a political agenda on race, while West's knowledge of and affection for jazz is obvious.

I am, however, disappointed that West does not see Louis Armstrong as the demi-god Burns portrays. Louis really was one of the greatest artists who ever lived. He was a Shakespeare, a Mozart, a Monet. The beauty he gave us is timeless.

BILL HASSAN
Holyoke, MA

THANK YOU for Diana West's dead-on criticism of Ken Burns. His viewpoints are to jazz music what Oprah's recommendations are to books—superficial, sappy, politically correct drivel that detracts from something worthwhile.

ANTHONY BIALY
Kenmore, NY

SHARE THE WEALTH

DINESH D'SOUZA'S ANALYSIS in "The Return of Inequality" is nothing less than brilliant, but he overlooks one point (Jan. 1/Jan. 8). His data provide ample support to the trickle down theory, à la Reagan and Kemp. A further trickle down could result from a Republican-supported pursuit of profit sharing (à la Goldwater and Reagan) as a more desirable alternative to minimum wage policy.

I don't mean government interference. Rather, non-profit agencies could be empowered to collect data and classify and compare competitors within each industry. This would attract the best workers to the most worker-friendly businesses and the least friendly would fall by the wayside.

I would love to see this done to Hollywood filmmakers. When they gave $7 million to President Clinton, was it from the money that should have been shared with workers, namely the key grips, dolly grips, property masters, and makeup artists?

VENKAT R. CHALLA
Winston-Salem, NC

UNDERSTANDING EHUD

TOM ROSE'S PIECE on why Ehud Barak has single-handedly undermined the achievements of the past 50 years is exacting, lucid, careful, and correct ("War Through Weakness," Jan. 15). It's a pleasure to read such insightful, clear analysis.

If only the object of his desiccation and microscopy, the craven outgoing Prime Minister Barak, would read Rose's essay and pull back from his folly before the state of Israel goes up in smoke.

MARION D.S. DREYFUS
New York, NY

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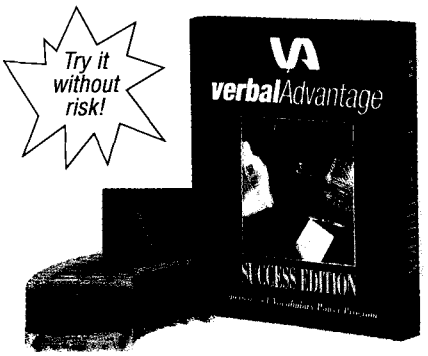

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the weekly Standard

Bush, as Advertised

What on earth has gotten into the liberals and the media? Perhaps affected by some sort of post-Palm Beach stress disorder, reporters and activists on the left have depicted George W. Bush as the leader of some sort of arch-conservative jihad. They've portrayed his tax plan as dangerously radical, some of his nominees as Confederacy-loving loons, and his voucher plan as a menace to the future of public education. To put it bluntly, this is all deranged. You get the impression that the left has actually started believing its own direct-mail fund-raising letters.

Over the past few weeks, George W. Bush has made it abundantly clear that he is who he has been telling us he is. From his first campaign speech in Iowa, through his national convention in Philadelphia, up to his inaugural address in Washington, Bush has been consistent: He has portrayed himself as an inclusive, not-particularly ideological compassionate conservative. He admires the nurturing caregiver rather than the rugged individualist or the entrepreneurial wealth creator. He prides himself on his ability to work across party lines. He has shown in a thousand and one ways that while he values responsibility and discipline, he is not a culture warrior.

It's amazing, after eight years of Clintonism: a president who tells us who he is, who sticks to his approach, and who carries through in office.

Many in the media and on the left seem to regard all this as some sort of show, as a slick and palatable front designed to mask the right-wing bogeyman underneath. But now President Bush is translating his campaign into policy proposals, and it is clear that he has been straightforward with the American people.

He placed his signature issue, education, at the top of the agenda. The plan he released last week should permanently dispel all notions that George W. Bush is an orthodox conservative. For over twenty years, conservatives have argued that the federal government should get out of the business of education policy; it should leave all that to states and localities. It's only five years since the Republican establishment was committed to eliminating the Department of Education. The Bush administration rejects all that. "Change will not come by disdaining or dismantling the federal role of education," Bush declared in his prepared remarks on Tuesday. The plan he is sending up to Congress transforms the federal role in education, but it does not reduce federal power.

For at least a quarter century, the conservative policy establishment has developed a coherent critique of American public education. The argument, which has been worked out over millions of think tank man hours, is that the central problem with our educational system is that it is a public monopoly. Power resides in an entrenched bureaucracy, which, Soviet-style, serves its own interests, not the interests of students and parents. Conservatives have argued that the system must be transformed to give consumers—students and their parents—more power. With more competition and more choice, the schools will have to improve.

The Bush administration doesn't reject this argument, but it doesn't embrace it either. It sort of gives it a pat on the back and moves on.

For the fact is, the Bush plan does little to move the education system toward a more market-oriented model. True, there is a useful provision to help generate start-up capital for charter schools. And true, there is a voucher provision, which has caused the Democratic party and the education establishment to go into collective hysterics. But this provision is a minuscule part of the Bush program. Bush offers exit vouchers, the kind that give students the ability to leave the extremely rare schools that are incorrigibly awful. The plan is modeled after a provision Jeb Bush pushed through in Florida. During the first year of that plan, students in only two schools qualified for the vouchers. This year, no new students qualify.

In other words, the voucher provision is not the main course in the Bush meal, which is the impression you'd get from watching all the coverage. It's not even the dessert. It's the after-dinner mint. President Bush is not opposed to efforts to increase consumer power, but he is not pushing them aggressively. There is no indication that at any time in the campaign he considered pushing them aggressively.

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Far from revolutionizing the education system, the Bush program is more like a corporate restructuring. It takes what was an old fashioned hierarchy, and it decentralizes it. The middle managers at the branch offices will be given greater flexibility to meet their production goals. The streamlined head office in Washington, D.C., will mostly measure outputs and reward or punish divisions depending on whether they are meeting their targets. We still have a public monopoly, but with much greater accountability. This is perestroika, not revolution.

The Bush plan would mandate that students take assessment tests each year between grades 3 and 8. Bush is opposed to national tests, but the federal Department of Education would have to review the states' tests to make sure they are providing accurate measures of student achievement. States' results would also be compared to the national results, as measured by the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP, tests, to make sure that states don't just make their tests easier in order to show student gains. This is the first time the NAEP tests have been used not only for information, but as enforcement mechanisms. It's not quite the national testing that some conservatives have feared, but it does give the federal government more influence over state tests.

Parents and educators would have a lot more information, and more reliable information, about how well their kids, schools, and states are doing. States would gain or lose federal money depending on how they performed. Schools that performed badly would be more likely to be identified and would receive special aid for improvements. Principals and staff at schools that performed badly over time could lose their jobs. Those at schools that succeeded would be able to point to concrete accomplishments, which would presumably put them in line for better posts and promotions. This plan is similar to the accountability plan that was enacted in Texas, with impressive results. The difference is that Texas has direct control over its standards and tests, whereas the federal government exercises indirect influence, so it has to rely on states and localities to actually go in and reform failing schools.

While each school district would have this imposing federal enforcer looking over its shoulder, it would also be given a lot more freedom. The Bush plan consolidates the infinitude of federal subsidy programs into a few large grants (the administration hasn't released exactly which programs will be consolidated). Along the way, a lot of the strings attached to those subsidies will be cut.

For example, federal subsidies designed to reduce class size mandate that districts hire more teachers. But suppose a district would rather use the money to retrain its current teachers than have smaller classes? Under the Bush plan, it looks like the district will be given that choice. Federal programs restrict how much bilingual education money can be spent on English immersion. Under the Bush plan, it looks like districts will be able to make their own decisions about bilingual ed. In other words, the Bush administration is willing to use federal power aggressively, but mostly in a specific area, in measurement and enforcement. The Bush plan would devolve more pedagogical power to the states and localities.

If you don't want to transform education along market lines—and the body politic seems not to be ready for that—then the Bush approach is a sensible way to go. Still, it's hard to be confident that this will dramatically improve schooling for America's underprivileged kids, let alone for middle-class kids who will be largely untouched by this program. It's been three decades since the public education monopoly first promised to, in effect, leave no child behind. Uncle Sam has spent over $120 billion in Title I money over those years in an effort to close the achievement gap between underprivileged kids and the rest of the population. All that money hasn't closed the gap. It hasn't even narrowed it.

Which is why it would have been nice if Bush had at least laid the groundwork for more dramatic market-based reform down the road, if that becomes necessary. Thirty years of failed pseudo-reforms and painful experience have certainly indicated that the problem with public education is not ultimately that the public monopoly has insufficient accountability mechanisms. The problem is that it is a public monopoly. If education is ever going to be radically improved for all students, it will most likely be because power will have been vested in parents, and schools will have been forced to compete to show results.

Of course, Bush can still educate the public about the possible need for fundamental reform later on. He can do it by fighting hard for his small voucher provision, even if he has to compromise it away at the end. After all, look at what the Democrats are favoring when they oppose this voucher plan. They are supporting the idea that students must remain trapped in failing schools. They must remain trapped in schools that have not improved even after heroic efforts have been made to turn them around. They must remain trapped in schools that are hopeless. And they must remain trapped in those schools because the education elites are dogmatically opposed to anything that goes by the name vouchers. The Bush administration ought to at least force the education elites to explain why they are sentencing kids—actual kids, who only get to grow up once—to failure.

But the larger point is that with this education plan, George W. Bush has given us a pretty good indication of what sort of president he will be. He will not be the orthodox conservative that many conservatives hoped for and many liberals feared. He will be a pragmatic and compassionate manager. It's amazing, after eight years of Clintonism: a president who tells us who he is, who sticks to his approach, and who then carries through on his ideas when in office. That's something.

—David Brooks, for the Editors

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Jesse Jackson Returns!

After a 48-hour withdrawal from public life, he's back. BY MATT LABASH

New York

JESSE JACKSON IS BACK. Some may not have known he was away, as one man's exile is another's long weekend. But after the recent *National Enquirer* bombshell that the married Jackson had fathered a daughter (now 20 months old) out of wedlock with Rainbow/PUSH Coalition staffer Karin Stanford, Jackson vowed to take time off to "revive my spirit and reconnect with my family" before returning to his "public ministry." "Ministry" here is a term of art the churchless reverend uses to describe his race-baiting, demonization of Republicans, and shaking down of corporations for large sums of money.

Jackson has mostly been applauded for saying this is "no time for evasions, denials, or alibis"—in contrast with Bill Clinton, whom Jackson counseled for "ministering" to Monica Lewinsky during the very time of Stanford's pregnancy. Indeed, considering a DNA test has established Jackson's paternity, evasion time seems to have been two years ago. As the *New York Post*'s Rod Dreher alone has reported, Rainbow/PUSH sent out a press release in March 1999 announcing Stanford's maternity leave and naming another man as the father of her child. Shortly thereafter, Stanford, who wrote a book about Jackson with the unfortunate title *Beyond the Boundaries*, relocated to Los Angeles, where she lives in a $365,000 home, drives a BMW, and enjoys $3,000-per-month child support payments from Jackson. This in addition to the $35,000 Rainbow/PUSH admits having paid her in (depending on the spokesperson) "severance pay," "moving expenses," "consulting fees," or the more colloquial "hush money."

Though Jackson's exile began on a Thursday, he announced his reemergence on Saturday, apparently having had his fill of reconnecting with his wife, Jackie, who told *Life* magazine in 1987 during a flurry of rumors about Jackson's extramarital activities, "If my husband has committed adultery, he better not tell me. And you better not go digging into it . . . " By all accounts, those painfully introspective 48 hours were a period of great breach-healing. Jackson talked with his family, played cards, and as Jonathan, his (legitimate) son, related, he helped eat "all the ribs and sandwiches in the house." In addition, Jackson took reassuring calls from world leaders (George W. Bush), former world leaders (Bill Clinton), and failed world leaders (Al Gore).

Now, with that painful chapter behind him, he is back to do the "nation's business" in Harlem's Canaan Baptist Church. It is the Tuesday after the scandal broke, and a support vigil is being sponsored by Al Sharpton, Jackson's protégé and rival. Though the two have known each other since Sharpton was a 12-year-old boy preacher, the relationship has soured in the past few years. Among self-respecting demagogues, Sharpton is generally regarded as coming by his dishonesty more honestly than Jackson. While both regularly prick corporations over racial

Matt Labash is a staff writer at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

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grievances—sometimes real, mostly imagined—Sharpton is largely a bullhorn-wielding creature of the streets, while Jackson heads foundations subsidized by the corporations he's purportedly monitoring.

Tonight, however, Sharpton has ginned up an outpouring of love because Jackson is a living legend, a mentor, and because, as a source close to Sharpton confides, "Jesse asked him to do it." Inside, the church sanctuary resembles Jackson's career in miniature: historic, with flashy gold-leaf-accented pillars attempting to distract attention from the crumbling plaster ceiling. Unlike other preacher sex scandals, this one will entail no quivering confessions, no rending of garments, no embarrassing I-have-sinned waterworks displays. Instead, the mood is defiant and celebratory. The band takes its place, as an organist noodles through introductions and prayers. Television cameras line the auditorium, trying to get shots of the stage through a thicket of church hats and paddle fans hauled out in the middle of January.

Though Jackson is usually accessible, even insistent on talking to the media, we can't get near him this evening. Our path is obstructed by beefy security guards. Jackson and Sharpton file onto the stage to take their high-backed throne-like seats among lesser clergy. Sharpton, as always, looks as if he ate the canary. He is flanked by Rep. Charlie Rangel, whose prodigious girth indicates he ate two or three. Rangel delivers what is one of the only overt references to the love-child story all evening, and it's directed at the media: "Get over it." Apparently we are not here to dwell on the past.

Jesse Jackson

We're here instead to celebrate Jackson (at one point, the audience cheers, "Run Jesse Run!") by means of an Afrocentric dance troupe and Willie Rogers, of the Soul Stirrers. Rogers rips through such spot-on Sam Cooke impressions that even the local white politicians, their complexions pink as shaved ham, are moved to gyrate, as Sharpton admonishes them to clap on the downbeat. The other reason we are here, the night's discourse makes clear, is Republicans. When they're not raping their mothers and eating their young, they steal elections and plant stories in scandal sheets. They've left Jackson little choice but to return from exile, Jackson says; after Bush's inauguration, "the winds shifted," leaving us with a "queasy, uneasy feeling." One that can only be rectified by Jesse Jackson, who will continue to advance his important agenda, such as ending capital punishment ("Jesus was on death row") and restoring voting rights to ex-felons.

As the service concludes in an amen-crescendo, Jackson slips out the back door with his entourage, which includes Jackie Robinson's widow. After slaloming through security, I jab a tape recorder at Jackson to inquire whether he has any intention of addressing puzzling love-child issues such as why Karin Stanford was paid moving expenses at the same time she was severing relations with Rainbow/PUSH. But Jackson shoos me with his meaty hand. "I have no comment," he says. Now is not the time to rehash, even if there hasn't been a time to hash. Now is the time for Jackson to take refuge in his chauffeured town car, to bark at Sharpton to find his cell phone, and to speed off to a midtown Sheraton for the opening reception of his fourth annual Wall Street Project convention.

The Wall Street Project is perhaps the most sophisticated mau-mauing apparatus ever hatched by a civil

Illustration by Thomas Fluharty

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rights activist. With bureaus in multiple cities to put the heat on corporations to provide "untapped capital" to "underutilized talent," the project sees to it that blue chip bigwigs like Freddie Mac and Verizon get to underwrite Jackson's celebrity golf tournament, his black-tie gala on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange, and other monuments to Jackson's hubris. All this so that the Wall Street Project can fight for projects benefiting disadvantaged minorities, such as a Delaware franchise in the Continental Basketball Association.

The morning after the Sharpton rally and the welcome reception, Jackson is holed up in a conference speakers' holding pen next to a continental breakfast bar. Trying not to seem too inaccessible (it is, after all, his convention), Jackson periodically pokes his head out. But when the media throng presses in, he quickly retreats in a sort of human version of whack-a-mole.

When Jackson finally does emerge to formally kick off the festivities, he does so behind the most distinguished offensive line since the mid-'80s Redskins. Blocking for Jackson are inner-city media magnate Percy Sutton, former New York mayor David Dinkins, and AOL Time Warner co-chief operating officer Bob Pittman. Pittman has come to announce not only that AOL Time Warner (a company that's just slashed over 1,000 employees) has generously updated the Rainbow/PUSH website, but that they're also launching a vehicle to help minority businessmen lay hands on venture capital. Jackson awkwardly applauds Pittman's "vision," saying "a one-eyed man is king in a blind city." (Not only did he mangle the cliché, but Pittman actually has a glass eye.)

While covering the conference, I'm unable to find a single attendee scandalized by Jackson's disclosure. Instead, they praise his "genius." They call him a "bold . . . man of intelligence" and "appreciate his courage for stepping out and being an example" of the "words of Dr. King." While Jackson is full of savvy investment advice ("Money grows on trees if it's planted in money mud"), his influence is most acutely felt in the shakedown of corporate "partners"—he calls it a "shake-up"—who thank him for the privilege. Though nearly everyone interviewed praises Jackson's soft-selling gregariousness, a quick calculation reveals that one-third of the companies the Wall Street Project lists as "gold" or "silver" partners have been threatened with Jackson boycotts.

After swimming around Jackson's blockers, a reporter asks Jackson if he'll be taking any questions about the scandal today. "No," Jackson chuckles. At the moment, there are more pressing matters—more pressing even than restoring voting rights to ex-felons. Today, Jackson is concerned with "insurance literacy," and so is moderating a CEO panel on "access and inclusion within the insurance industry." The panel features lengthy diversity-babbling disquisitions from the chairmen of American General and MetLife, who are about as interesting as . . . insurance salesmen. So excruciating is all the talk about customer affinity and group policies and diversity scorecards that Jackson himself at one point rests his cheek in the cradle of his palm and closes his eyes.

By mid-morning, most reporters who came to extract even a single comment from Jackson about the scandal have given up, allowing him to escape once more. Some apparently thought the Rev. Jackson's situation might at the very least be taken as a sign of spiritual bankruptcy, a lack of moral seriousness, that diminished his stature among race-hustling activists. But with the president's sympathetic phone call, the public embrace from his own rivals, and the deep pockets of the one-eyed man, Jackson's admission is shaping up to be something quite unexpected: an excellent career move. ♦

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The Unpardonable Pardon

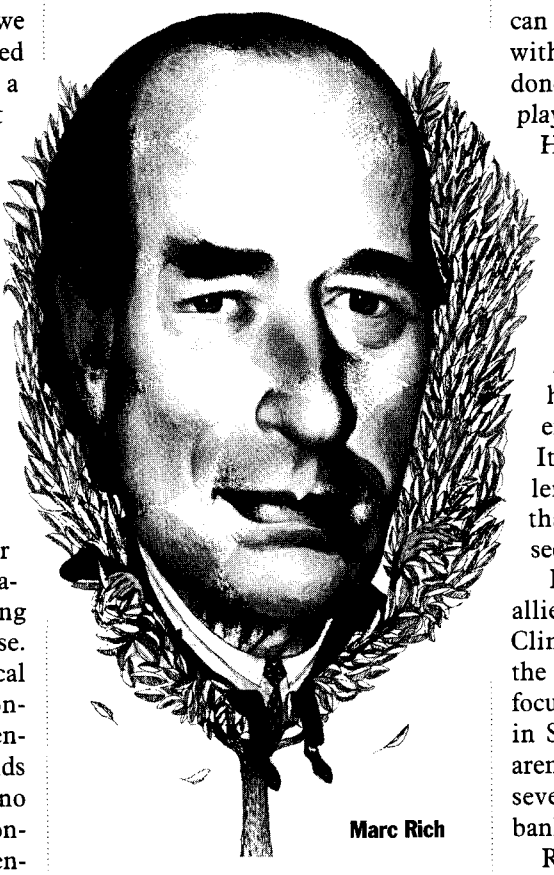
Everything rotten in the Clinton presidency came together in the Marc Rich case. BY JAMES HIGGINS

LATE-NIGHT COMEDIANS have done much to persuade Americans that Bill Clinton's finger-wagging "I did not have sexual relations with that woman" denial was the action that captured the essence of his presidency. But it wasn't.

Hearing the name Al Capone, we don't think of the gangster hunched over a desk, smirking as he signs a false income tax return, though it was income tax evasion that was Capone's downfall. The Lewinsky case, similarly, is just what Clinton was caught at.

But the moral rot was much more profound, as became clear even to the president's defenders with his last minute pardon of Marc Rich. Clinton, the master political tactician of our time, saved for last the one action that weaves together *every* major variation on the sociopathic fugue that was Clintonism: Big dollars for Democrat coffers. Tolerance of treason. An attractive divorcée making repeated visits to the White House. Betrayal of unmoneyed political allies of principle in favor of moneyed allies of convenience. Presidential actions so far outside the bounds of decency that no observer and no other president could even have conceived of them in advance. Presidential embrace of characters previous presidents would have dealt with using the FBI or the military. And all of this covered by lies, small and large. That's a lot of variations, but Clinton managed to find a way to capture all of them just by signing his name to the Rich pardon.

By now the basics of the Marc Rich case have become well known: He carried out the largest income tax evasion in U.S. history; he did business with the Ayatollah Khomeini in violation of the Trading With the Enemy Act while the staff of the U.S. Embassy were being held hostage in Iran; he and also-pardoned associate "Pinky" Green, facing indictment, fled the United States in 1983 and never returned. And, to the fury of the law enforcement community, the unrepentant fugitive has now won a pardon without serving a day in jail or even standing trial.



Marc Rich

Illustration by Earl Keleny

Oversized descriptions seem to fit Rich. His biographer A. Craig Copetas called him "the most wanted white-collar criminal in America" and quoted unnamed Justice Department officials shortly after Rich's abrupt departure for Switzerland as deeming him "the most corrupt corporate executive in America."

Why would Clinton have pardoned such a man? The most obvious explanation is that Rich's ex-wife Denise has become a major donor and fund-raiser for the Clintons. And it's true that she visited Clinton at the White House many times. One can easily picture Denise Rich, along with a number of last-minute pardonees and their friends and family, playing an important role in funding Hillary Clinton's future political career. But if Bill Clinton simply wanted to recruit a Grateful Felons Finance Committee for Hillary, he could have done so right here in the good old U.S.A. He needn't have gone as far as Zug, Switzerland, with a pardon he must have known would enrage law enforcement officials. It's the antagonism, even malevolence, toward the justice system that makes Clinton's parting shot seem so pathological.

Betrayal of unmoneyed political allies has been another theme of Clintonism, a theme that recurs in the Rich pardon. Media coverage has focused on Rich's business activities in Switzerland and Iran. But those aren't the only places Rich made the several billion coins in his piggy bank.

Rich's stock in trade is reported to be false documents, usually to disguise the origin, path, or destination of a commodity, usually in order to evade a tax or prohibition. In the 1980s the commodity was oil, and the customer was apartheid South Africa, then under U.N. trade sanctions. Rich has been described in the South African press as "the most prolific buster of the oil embargo." Pardon-

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ing the man who kept apartheid's engines running was Bill Clinton's thanks to his most loyal supporters, the African-American community in the United States.

Rich's unsavory associations don't stop with South Africa. His name turns up in a 1992 report by senators John Kerry (D-MA) and Hank Brown (R-CO) to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee about BCCI, once the global one-stop banking supermarket for arms traffickers, drug dealers, and money launderers. After describing a complex series of transactions between BCCI and Rich, the report concludes, "The nature and extent of Rich's relationship with BCCI requires further investigation." The next year Bill Clinton came to the White House, and the "further investigation" seems never to have happened.

Rich's lawyers and Denise Rich's publicists have trotted out a series of excuses for having circumvented the usual Department of Justice review process in seeking a pardon for Rich. Denise Rich first had a publicist deny that she was involved in seeking the pardon. Then, when a December 2000 letter from her to Bill Clinton asking for the pardon came to light, she remembered that, oh yes, she *had* been involved. One Rich lawyer, Robert F. Fink, claimed that "We couldn't get people to meet and talk with us." Fink subsequently claimed that Rich's case could not go to the Department of Justice because Rich had never been convicted.

Most media speculation, though, has focused on the influence of Rich's new lawyer, and Clinton's old lawyer, Jack Quinn. Onetime Clinton pollster Dick Morris has gone so far as to suggest that Quinn knows where so many Clinton skeletons are buried his request could not be turned down. Clintonism has become so accepted that no one even blinks when a president's former chief political adviser says, plausibly and without qualification, that an outgoing president was blackmailed into giving a pardon.

But another Rich relationship may better explain his lawyers' decision to circumvent the usual review process. Sources in the oil trading community in the United States believe that Rich has in recent years done business with Iraq. If true, that would be in Rich's long tradition of trading with the enemy. Had Rich's lawyers gone through the usual channels to apply for a pardon, word of the dealings he is believed to have with Iraq would certainly have come out during the law enforcement community's review of the pardon application.

If circumventing proper channels in order to reach an inexcusable decision sounds like another familiar variation of Clintonism, it's because we've seen it before. Recall that in August 1998 Clinton excluded four of the five members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff from learning in advance about the bombing of a medicine factory in the Sudan—a bombing that managed to blast Monica Lewinsky's deposition off the front page.

And Clinton himself, asked about his last-minute pardons on his first day as a private citizen, replied inimitably, "You're not saying these people didn't commit an offense. You're saying they paid, they paid in full, and they've been out long enough after their sentence to show they are good citizens." No propaganda minister could have written a more fitting postscript for the Clinton administration, since, at least as regards Marc Rich, there was not a particle of truth in what Clinton said.

Just how could Clinton have gotten the idea and audacity for the Rich pardon? The answer to this question about Clinton's last act as president may lie in an episode from the dawn of his career as a chief executive.

Turn back the clock to December 1978. A man named Ray Blanton had been governor of Tennessee for four years and had been an embarrassment to Tennesseans. Blanton did not run for reelection in 1978, and

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38-year-old Lamar Alexander won the open seat. Following the election, before the new governor was sworn in, Blanton began pardoning inmates wholesale. The U.S. Attorney's office got word that Blanton was selling pardons, rushed Blanton off the stage early and had Alexander sworn in ahead of schedule. Blanton went to prison on corruption charges. Alexander sorted out the mess and in doing so established his reputation as an honest and efficient governor.

What does this old, obscure political tale have to do with Marc Rich? In the very same year the departing Blanton was selling pardons, an ambitious 32-year-old won his first term as governor of the state next door. Could such a quick study and news addict as William Jefferson Clinton have failed to notice the extensive media coverage coming into Arkansas from Memphis TV stations and other news outlets?

Blanton lacked the ruthlessness and cunning to get away with it. He dealt with criminals who were not very smart and not very wealthy. His quid pro quos were blatant: pardons for money. And he issued pardons long enough before he left office to attract attention to what he was doing while it was still going on.

Whatever else one may say about the Clintons, they do learn from the errors of others. A staffer on the House Judiciary Committee in 1974, Hillary Rodham Clinton learned from watching Richard Nixon how not to conduct a cover-up. Bill Clinton seems to have learned from Ray Blanton how not to carry out end-of-term pardons. By the time the media began to realize on January 20 what Clinton had done on his way out the door, Clinton and his staff had sacked the White House offices, departed, and were already looting Air Force One en route to New York.

Bill Clinton arrived in Washington telling us that he would "put people first." We had to learn the hard way that by "people" he meant himself, his cronies, and a billionaire fugitive felon called, perfectly, Mr. Rich. ♦

Bush's Race Opportunity

He shouldn't let his lack of success (so far) with black voters deter him. BY TAMAR JACOBY

IT'S HARD TO REMEMBER A TIME in recent decades when blacks as a group seemed angrier about politics. Despite the Republican party's unprecedented efforts to appeal to them in the recent campaign, a full 50 percent of black voters think George W. Bush "stole" the election (in contrast to 26 percent of whites). His attorney general designate John Ashcroft, a politician five times elected statewide in Missouri, has been turned into a symbol of implacable racism. Even the Bush cabinet, the most racially mixed in history, has failed to find approval from blacks: Only 22 percent say they are pleased by the president's appointments. And the civil rights establishment has all but declared war on the new administration: Not just the Rev. Al Sharpton but many members of the Congressional Black Caucus spearheaded protests on Inauguration Day.

What is the Bush administration to do in the face of this disaffection? California regent Ward Connerly and others have urged a period of "benign neglect" of race issues. Nothing the Bush team does, after all, is likely to satisfy the irrepressible Jesse Jackson or NAACP president Kweisi Mfume; nor is any short-term measure likely to win over rank-and-file black voters, 90 percent of whom rejected Bush. But, understandable as it would be for the president simply to turn his back, the truth is that Bush's approach to race is too interesting and important to be put on the shelf, however unappreciated it may be in these earliest days of his administration.

The president's campaign rhetoric and inaugural address, his record in Texas, and the way he has assembled his government all suggest a refreshing idea of America and how it ought to hold together. It is a vision based on outreach and inclusion: No other Republican in memory has tried so hard to win black or Latino votes. It is a vision that stresses individual responsibility: witness Bush's emphasis on education and his denunciation of "the soft bigotry of low expectations," the most resonant phrase of his campaign.

But for all Bush's concern about minorities, his is also a vision that resists the color-coding Americans now take for granted in public life. Just listen to Bush on the day he announced the appointments of Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice, and White House counsel Alberto Gonzales: Never once mentioning their race or ethnicity, the president said he wanted to send a message that "people who work hard and make the right decisions in life can achieve anything they want in America."

This inclusive but race-neutral vision is a welcome departure from the largely Democratic race-consciousness the nation has pursued for nearly four decades—and also from traditional Republican neglect. It is a vision full of possibility. The challenge Bush faces is to make it real.

The president seems to know that results are what's important, and he is off to a good start, moving to fulfill his campaign pledges on education. There is no more direct route to inclusion than making school effective for

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AP/Wide World Photos

Bush with D.C. mayor Anthony Williams and his wife Diana

every child. And minorities know this: According to one recent California survey, education is twice as important to blacks, Latinos, and Asian-Americans as their next priority, crime, and about five times as important as the economy.

School choice is overwhelmingly popular with black parents, but the president's strategy need not hinge on vouchers, which are only one means to the end of educating every child. Far more important is narrowing the minority performance gap. Bush is already seeking to prod school districts not just to try but actually succeed in teaching basic skills to all students. A next step might be incentives to insure that all teenagers finish high school—a particularly elusive goal in the Latino community, where the dropout rate approaches 40 percent. And the president could encourage corporate chiefs to get more involved in what happens after high school, helping all students make the best choice at that point.

Bush's instincts are sound: So far he has avoided talking about any of these initiatives in racial terms. In due time, with presidential awards, school visits, and other political theater, he can show plainly enough the range of children who are benefiting from his education policies.

A second vast realm where the president can press ahead is the economy, helping people help themselves to move up the ladder. Here, he can begin with further encouragement—and support services where necessary—for people in transition from welfare to work. Another goal, already spotlighted by Housing and Urban Development secretary Melquiades Martinez, is spurring home ownership in poor neighborhoods; after many mistakes, the federal government is slowly learning how to do this. Still another is promoting small-business growth.

Here, as in so many areas, color-coding has invited corruption and unfairness. In its place, there is no shortage of ways the Bush team can smooth the path for urban entrepreneurs: from capital-gains tax cuts, to encouragement of deregulation at the local level, to increased funding for community and faith-based business incubators. The effects of such measures would be noticed immediately, both in immigrant enclaves, already engines of urban growth, and in black neighborhoods, where the dearth of locally owned businesses remains a sore spot.

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When it comes to values and ideology, the new administration may find minority communities more receptive than it expects. Latinos, Asian Americans, and blacks all poll more favorably on "family values" than whites. Both immigrants and blacks support school prayer, school uniforms, and "charitable choice" legislation designed to help sustain church-based social programs. And all want freedom from the scourge of crime. If the Bush administration acts to defuse the emotional issue of racial profiling—as John Ashcroft has hinted it will—it might then be able to make common cause with inner-city residents, who, polls show, are far more supportive than black leaders of tough law enforcement.

Of course, there are also issues on which Republicans will never rally much support from minorities. The belief that race matters—and the conviction that the government can fix things—are articles of faith in the black community. Still, any constituency can be persuaded by results, as the success of the new "crossover" black mayors has shown in the past decade. Men like Anthony Williams in Washington, D.C., and Dennis Archer in Detroit have dispensed with their predecessors' demagoguery and concentrated on making things work for constituents, usually with interracial coalition politics and incentives for self-help. The Bush administration might take a page from these shrewd mayors, who remain above the fray when others indulge in angry grandstanding.

And if blacks cannot be reconciled to a federal government that eschews color-coding, many Hispanics and Asian Americans will appreciate it, whether because quotas long barred them from benefits, or because, with their mixed heritage and high rates of intermarriage, they have little use for rigid ethnic categories.

To make all this work will require the bully pulpit. Bush can use it to eclipse outmoded civil rights rhetoric with the language of opportunity and achievement, personal responsibility and social mobility. And he can hold out a beacon of hope—an image of America that has room for all kinds of people and in which all have a chance to prosper.

The president made a fine start in his inaugural address, close to half of which, astonishingly, was devoted to issues of poverty, in entirely race-neutral language. Our country's grandest ideal, Bush said, is "that everyone belongs, that everyone deserves a chance, that no insignificant person was ever born." But only by repeatedly articulating this vision, in as many different contexts as possible, can Bush and his administration create a real alternative to grievance-based politics.

In giving voice to this vision, the president can invoke the glory days of the civil rights movement. He can talk about self-help, always an honored goal, even in the worst period of black dependency. He can distract both blacks and whites from the stubborn fight over affirmative action by proving that there are far better ways to help people get ahead. He might even update the old image of the melting pot, a picture of inclusiveness and shared destiny that still resonates strongly for most immigrants.

No government should expect or pretend it can solve all the problems of race. That was the biggest mistake of the '60s—the mistake that unleashed that era's fateful hubris and the patronizing, deeply damaging belief that whites should be held responsible for blacks' troubles. But what the Bush administration can do is transform the terms of the debate about race and ethnicity. Four years of deft rhetoric combined with some examples of real change could work a historic shift in the way we all think about difference and disadvantage in America. ♦

Che's Man in the Congo

How did the U.S. and its allies end up supporting a thug like Laurent Kabila? BY STEPHEN SCHWARTZ

IN THE KIND OF COINCIDENCE on which Africa thrives, but which went unnoticed in most Western media, Congo-Kinshasa dictator Laurent Kabila was shot to death only a few hours before the 40th anniversary of the demise of his presumed revolutionary role model, Patrice Lumumba. Of course, given how power now works in Africa, it was surprising to nobody that during his three-and-a-half year rulership Kabila resembled his immediate predecessor, the corrupt Mobutu Sese Seko, more than the ascetic and idealistic Lumumba.

Stephen Schwartz's latest book is Intellectuals and Assassins, *a collection of essays on Stalinism.*

But Kabila's kleptocratic habits were widely noted in the world press. What escaped comment was the extraordinary enthusiasm with which the Clinton administration, as well as European chancelleries, embraced Kabila as a putative factor for stability in Congo and preferable to Mobutu. It was as if the man's entire previous career had never existed.

Kabila was in fact a kind of evil twin to South African leader Nelson Mandela. Both men benefited from the political and financial support of the former Soviet empire and its Cuban client, but Kabila was an unregenerate revolutionary thug who gloried in his long-ago involvement with the granddaddy of all radical gang-

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sters, Ernesto "Che" Guevara.

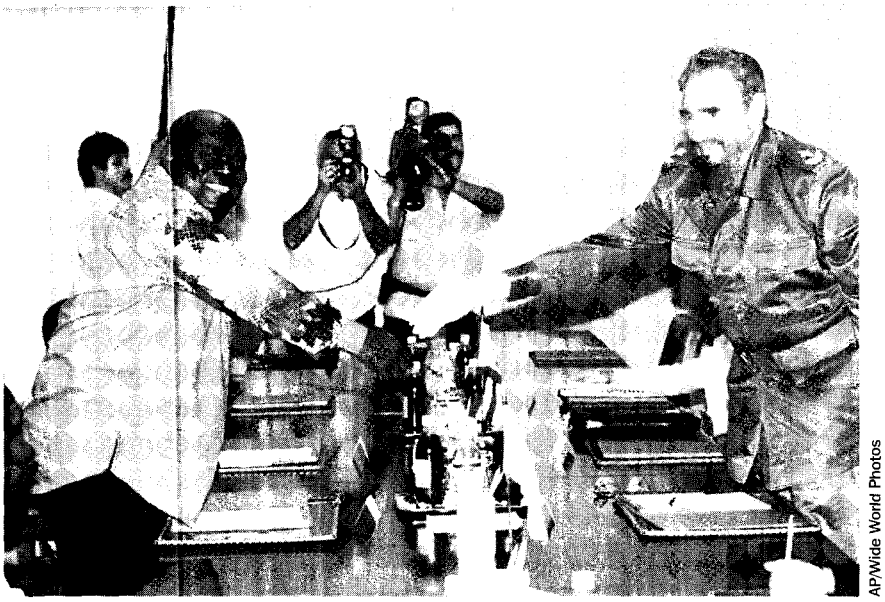
Unlike Mandela, who gained deserved respect after demonstrating his capacity for dignified statesmanship, Kabila proved an outstanding graduate of the Castro-Guevara school of politics, promoting violence within his domain. He enjoyed indispensable military support from the Cuban-sponsored regimes of Angola, Namibia, and Zimbabwe. And he seemed bent, in a sense, on proving Jeane Kirkpatrick right in her distinction between authoritarianism, exemplified by Mobutu, and the totalitarianism Kabila represented. Mobutu was an amateur tyrant; Kabila was a professional. But as noted above, he might not have lasted even a week without the astonishingly beneficent gaze of the Western capitals.

Laurent-Désiré Kabila first gained attention four decades ago as a member of the Baluba nationalist militia. Two years after Lumumba's death, Kabila joined the martyred leader's followers in the National Liberation Committee. In 1965, he met Che. The Argentine insurrectionary had left Cuba for an African tour, traveling first to Algeria and then to Mali, Congo-Brazzaville, Guinea, Ghana, and Dahomey (now Benin), all then Moscow-friendly one-party states. Che was greeted in Tanzania by dictator Julius Nyerere and introduced to Kabila and another Congolese revolutionary leader.

Guevara then repaired to Congo where, with 100 Cuban colleagues, he dedicated several months to "the revolutionary war." Team Guevara trained combatants for the so-called "Simba" uprising against then-president Moise Tshombe.

"Simba" means "lion," yet Kabila was anything but. In a personal narrative, Guevara described Kabila as a coward who preferred partying in Cairo and Paris, "issuing communiques and drinking Scotch in the company of beautiful women." Nearer to the front line, Kabila commuted between saloons and whorehouses, according to the puritanical Argentine.

But Kabila knew things Che did not. He prevented Guevara and his cohort from assuming direct command over the Congolese soldiery, very sensibly realizing that black rebels were unlikely to take orders from a white man. One might even entertain the thought that each at least subconsciously saw in the other, beneath the Marxist costume, a racial cliché. Guevara viewed Kabila as a loose, lecherous African, and Kabila may have considered Guevara a white adventurer, an updated Dr. Livingstone, since Guevara was also a physician by training. They deserved each other, even if they didn't like each other.



AP/Wide World Photos

Kabila and Castro in Havana, July 1998

Che's Africa campaign did not last long. His asthmatic constitution was undermined, and he found nobody among the Congolese in whom he could feel confidence. He soon went back to Cuba. Mobutu took over from Tshombe in Congo. By the end of 1967, Guevara was dead in Bolivia.

Kabila continued his depredations with patronage from Nyerere, although he eventually took time out to traffic in precious commodities, always a lucrative sideline in the region. The Simbas waved their banner into the 1980s, from a Khmer Rouge-style "liberated zone" in Congo, and Kabila showed off his uniform. He became a champion revolutionary tourist, stopping in to see Saddam Hussein and Yasser Arafat. Along with Tanzania, Kabila gained the on-and-off patronage of Libya, Sudan, faithful Cuba, and North Korea.

But from the time his Alliance of Democratic Liberation Forces emerged as a leading contender to pick up the pieces of Mobutu's regime, Kabila made it clear he remembered very well the particular Guevarist principles that have turned out to be his lasting legacy in Africa: Where guerrilla revolution fails, dictatorship can succeed. On his victorious march to Kinshasa, Kabila announced that his government would not tolerate multiple parties or a competitive press.

This tale would be of little global significance were it not for the fact that the Clinton administration, its European partners, and the international cadres of humanitarian imperialism rushed so obscenely to congratulate Kabila as the savior of Congo.

In an outrageous comparison that was all too typical, Roger Winter, the director of the U.S. Committee for Refugees, who "met Kabila a couple of times," was quoted by ABC News declaring that Kabila was no longer a Marxist. "That was 30 years ago," Winter said. "Yeltsin was a Marxist 30 years ago too."

Well, yes, and so was the author of this article. But a lot of us, Boris Yeltsin included, came to our senses. Kabila never did. His demise closes the books on a chapter in Clinton-era foreign policy. Let's hope the Bush administration looks more closely when it comes to congratulating new political heavies in the hotspots of the world. ♦

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The FDA and the Abortion Pill

The approval of RU-486 has become a study in political malpractice. BY JENNIFER KABBANY

AT HIS RECENT Senate confirmation hearing for secretary of Health and Human Services, Wisconsin governor Tommy Thompson hinted that the Clinton administration's approval of the abortion pill might be revisited. Last September, the Food and Drug Administration approved the drug mifepristone, commonly known as RU-486, for use in the United States. But Thompson, responding to questions from senator Hillary Rodham Clinton, said, "It's a new drug, it's contentious and controversial, and the safety of it, as I understand, is in question."

In fact, a week before RU-486 was approved last summer, nine senators wrote to HHS secretary Donna Shalala asking her to delay a decision until more was known about the drug's manufacturer. The senators objected to the FDA's refusal to reveal where the drug would be made. FDA officials said their reason for withholding the identity of the manufacturer was concern for the company's safety from antiabortion groups. But that argument fell apart once the *Washington Post* broke the news on October 12 that America's supply of RU-486 would be made by Hua Lian Pharmaceutical in Shanghai, China.

Around the same time, questions were raised about Hua Lian Pharmaceutical's repeated failure over the course of ten years to meet FDA standards. As recently as 1998, the California Health Department found not only that the company had illegally sent a shipment of drugs to America, but that it contained the unapproved drug fluorouracil. In July 2000 in Cincinnati, the FDA confiscated a shipment from Hua Lian's factory "for false or misleading labeling and misbranding."

Virginia Republican Tom Bliley, chairman of the House Commerce Committee, wrote to FDA commissioner Jane Henney on November 1 chastising the agency for disregarding the manufacturer's history. "The threat to public health posed by the shipment of contaminated medicines, and other violations . . . is a pattern of conduct that reflects on the honesty and integrity of the management of [Hua Lian Pharmaceutical]," Bliley wrote. "I do not believe the FDA's position is acceptable for a public health agency."

Doubt was also being cast, meanwhile, on the safety of cytotec, the second component of the "abortion pill"—a misnomer for a two-drug abortion-inducing treatment usually spread out over three days. Two days after the mother takes a dose of mifepristone, to kill her embryo, she takes cytotec, which causes uterine contractions to expel it from her body.

Made by the U.S. company Searle, cytotec has been legal in the United States for 13 years to combat stomach ulcers. But because of its possible side-effects, cytotec carries a "Black Box" warning. This explains that the drug, if taken by a pregnant woman, can induce labor and cause the uterus to rupture, resulting in severe bleeding, hospitalization, surgery, infertility, or death. In August 2000, just before the FDA approved RU-486, Searle sent a "Dear Doctor" letter to 200,000 health care providers reminding them that Searle has not studied, and the FDA has not approved, cytotec's use to induce abortions.

After the letter was circulated, nearly half of U.S. hospitals told obstetricians and gynecologists to stop using cytotec for off-label purposes, according to a survey by the University HealthSystem Consortium. By that time, damage had already been done. An article in the January/February issue of *Mother Jones* magazine based on documents released pursuant to a Freedom of Information Act request states that in the last three years, the FDA "has received reports of 30 cases of uterine rupture in connection with the use of cytotec."

But speed, rather than safety, seems to have governed the process of approving the abortion pill. Apparently eager to get RU-486 to market before the Clinton administration left office, the FDA reviewed it on a "fast-track" timetable intended to hasten the approval of treatments for diseases like cancer and AIDS. Guidelines specify that to be considered on the fast track, a drug *must* "provide meaningful therapeutic benefits to patients over existing treatments" to combat a "serious or life-threatening illness." The day RU-486 was approved, Republican senator Tim Hutchinson noted that the "FDA review time was a mere six months, . . . even faster than the average time for 'fast-tracked' drugs." He added, "The administration rushed a drug through that will take lives instead of save them."

Now chaired by pro-life Republican Billy Tauzin, the House Energy and Commerce Committee is investigating. The FDA declines to comment on the investigation or Thompson's suggestion that the approval of RU-486 might be reexamined. As for Thompson's boss, George W. Bush said in the October 3 presidential debate: "Once the decision's made, it's been made . . . unless it's proven to be unsafe to women." ♦

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The Candidate and the Briefing Book

His enemies were not the only ones Ronald Reagan surprised.

By Jeffrey Bell

It was 1975, and I found myself in the middle of a struggle of wills between John Sears and Ronald Reagan. In retrospect, this may sound interesting, but at the time it was anything but enjoyable. Sears was the most brilliant political strategist I've ever known. Reagan was the greatest man I've ever known, though to be honest I had no inkling of this yet.

Not for the first or last time, Sears and Reagan were furious at each other, so furious that I didn't know what to do or what to make of it.

The issue was the briefing book Sears had instructed me to write for Reagan, to prepare him for his upcoming primary challenge to President Gerald Ford. I was writing it, but Reagan wasn't reading it. This was not a morale builder for me, but to Sears it was infuriating. Sears's everyday demeanor was droll and understated, but when he was angry, most people who knew him found him frightening, even on occasion Reagan, who normally seemed afraid of no one.

To Sears and to me, the gold standard of presidential politics was the Nixon campaign of 1968. Objectively speaking, that campaign and that candidate had made quite a few mistakes. But from the perspective of 1975, it was the only time in almost a half century that the Republican party had taken over the White House without running a war hero. And it was our formative experience.

In 1968, Sears at a precocious 27 was a top-level Nixon political operative. At 24, I was a lowly research assistant, just out of the Army, running errands for Pat Buchanan and a policy/issues team that included (a partial list) Alan Greenspan, Richard Allen, William Safire, Martin Anderson, Ray Price, Richard Whalen, plus (junior aides like me) John Lehman, Kevin Phillips, Ken Khachigian, and (following Nixon's defeat of Nelson Rockefeller) George Gilder and a handful of other liberal Republicans.

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All of these staffers, and others, contributed to Nixon's briefing book, which was maintained and constantly updated by Buchanan. The briefing book, written in question-and-answer format, was enormous, of biblical proportions, growing and evolving as the campaign progressed. The reason so much effort was put into it is that Nixon wanted it that way. He spent countless hours poring over it, and knew it well, because he never wanted to be surprised by the nastiest question his worst enemy could think of. His writers were kept energized by Nixon's commitment to the briefing book, which meant that at any time, and without warning, they were likely to hear the former vice president using the exact words they had written to fend off somebody's question. Those words had better be accurate and defensible, or the writers knew they might find themselves invited into the crewcut, uncompassionate presence of campaign chief of staff H.R. Haldeman, Nixon's designated bad cop.

Now, eight years later, post-Watergate spending limits had arrived, and what Nixon's awe-inspiring stable of writers and policy advisers had labored to produce had fallen largely to me, as research director of Citizens for Reagan, with help from a corporal's guard of outside volunteers. Aside from a willingness to write in an authoritative tone about subjects I knew little or nothing about—a necessity in these matters—my main virtue in Sears's eyes was that I had watched Buchanan continually update Nixon's briefing book and therefore had some idea of how the process was supposed to work.

But Reagan seldom looked at the book. To Sears, this meant one thing: Reagan was intellectually lazy and would be unprepared for what awaited him in his challenge to Ford.

Sears had earlier been picked to manage the anticipated presidential campaign of Vice President Spiro Agnew, and I was hoping to work on the issues staff, when a scandal erupted that eventually forced Agnew to resign his office in October 1973 to avoid an indictment for bribery. Sears had therefore shot his way into the leadership of Reagan's campaign against Ford quite late, and now his worst fears

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about the aging Hollywood actor, the very fears that had caused him to prefer Agnew as the next conservative standard-bearer, seemed in danger of being realized. Reagan was too much a lightweight to bother to read his own briefing book. The liberal press and Ford strategist Stuart Spencer would combine to eat Reagan alive.

They didn't quite do that, but Ford did of course beat Reagan, and Sears and I (along with many others) thought Reagan's preparation on issues was a factor. A lot of people, it should be mentioned, blamed Reagan's loss on me, for persuading Reagan to advocate an overly ambitious $90 billion decentralization plan that he found difficult to defend. Part of my private defense was my contention that I and the others who worked on the plan had anticipated most of the attacks by the liberals and the Ford campaign, but that Reagan wouldn't read that part of his briefing book. (The only virtue of this defense is that it was so ineffective I soon gave up on it.)

Key to Ford's victory was his come-from-behind 49-48 percent win in New Hampshire, where he pounded on the $90 billion plan and on Reagan's long-standing advocacy of a voluntary Social Security system. Ford increased his margins in several subsequent primaries, and the Reagan campaign ran out of money. On Tuesday, March 23, Reagan completed his campaigning in North Carolina, and defeat was so universally expected that he and his traveling party took off in the campaign plane before any results were known, planning to concede the nomination to Ford a day or two later.

But two strong-willed and extremely stubborn Reagan backers from North Carolina, a freshman senator named Jesse Helms and his political manager, Tom Ellis, had raised enough money to buy local television time for a 30-minute speech by Reagan denouncing the Ford-Kissinger policy of détente with the Soviet Union. The speech had been taped weeks earlier in the studio of a Florida station that had offered all the presidential candidates a half hour of free time. Although there was widespread agreement that the foreign-policy theme was beginning to click, Reagan's national staff was skeptical that large numbers of voters would listen to 30 minutes of any politician, particularly a tape that had never been intended as professional advertising, and looked it.

Helms and Ellis would not take no for an answer. Eventually, Ellis cut a deal with Sears dedicating all the money the North Carolina Reagan committee managed to raise to more air time for the Florida videotape.

Word came to the Reagan traveling party in mid-air that against every expectation, Reagan had defeated Ford in North Carolina. At first, Reagan himself refused to believe the news. But not only had he won, when he went on national television a week later to resurrect his campaign, so much money came in that the campaign couldn't spend it all.

Everyone could see the flaws in Reagan and his 1976 campaign, including mistakes made by Sears and me. Yet somehow it all added up to more than the sum of its parts. Reagan ended up defeating Ford in 12 primaries, and came within one or two delegations of winning the nomination at the Kansas City convention. When Jimmy Carter defeated Ford, Reagan emerged as the real GOP winner of 1976. He was well positioned to run again in 1980.

After a bloody series of power struggles with Reagan's California staff, Sears emerged as the campaign manager again. Reagan was such an overwhelming front-runner for the nomination going into 1980 that many of his advisers, including Sears, hoped he could avoid the kind of near-death experience he had lived through the night of North Carolina. This hope was not to be realized. Not surprisingly, the crisis of the 1980 nomination fight was triggered by a resumption of the tension between Reagan and Sears over the quality of Reagan's issue preparation: In a sense, the briefing book, again.

Sears's most fateful decision, the one that armed his many enemies in Reagan's orbit, was to keep Reagan out of the *Des Moines Register* debate right before the Iowa caucus in January 1980. At the time, this seemed reasonable. Reagan, who had been well known in Iowa since his days as a young sports announcer in the 1930s, seemed to have a solid lead over a field of challengers far less well known than he. More important, Sears feared Reagan wasn't ready to debate. He concluded that the risk of a Reagan embarrassment in the debate was greater than the risk of losing Iowa. Indeed, Sears thought Reagan might win Iowa and still see his campaign begin to unravel if he looked ill-prepared, out of touch, and therefore too old to be president.

So Reagan skipped the debate. Bush won Iowa, and was instantly transformed from an unknown, single-digit New Hampshire candidate to a solid front-runner. The closeness of Bush's win in Iowa made it appear that if Reagan had attended the debate, he would have at least edged Bush in the Iowa caucus and remained the front-runner in New Hampshire. In the Reagan camp, Sears got full blame for a possibly fatal blunder.

It was clear to Reagan and those close to him that Sears's decision to bypass the Iowa debate was a vote of no confidence in Reagan's issue preparation. Moreover, issue preparation was a subtext of Sears's factional wars against Reagan's California veterans. Sears earlier had forced Martin Anderson, Lyn Nofziger, and (most shockingly) Mike Deaver to leave the campaign staff. And he and his allies

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AP/Wide World Photos

John Sears (inset) in 1976, mastermind of Reagan's triumph in this February 23, 1980, New Hampshire debate

increasingly blamed Reagan's only surviving California adviser, Ed Meese, for inadequate preparation of the candidate.

Following Iowa, the 69-year-old Reagan was counted out by many in the national press. The view that Reagan was just too old and too right-wing to become president was back in full force. George Bush, now a nationally known figure, exulted about the "Big Mo" and flew confidently to New Hampshire with a lead in the nation's first primary of 10 points or more. Poor cash-flow management had left the Reagan campaign perilously close to its legal spending limits not just in New Hampshire, but in the nomination fight as a whole. This would make it difficult if not impossible for Reagan to make a stand in a subsequent state should he lose New Hampshire.

Reagan needed a North Carolina-style resurrection, but this time the roles of Jesse Helms and Tom Ellis would have to be played by two men who now were barely on speaking terms—Ronald Reagan and John Sears. Amazingly, they both proved equal to the occasion. In their utterly different ways, they began operating in a kind of political overdrive I've never seen equaled before or since.

This was the last political cycle in which there was a five-week interval between Iowa and New Hampshire. Reagan set himself a dawn-to-late-night schedule, and kept it. He performed well in press interviews and candidate debates, seeming to relish the role of underdog. He gave greater emphasis to New York congressman Jack Kemp's tax cut proposal as a defining issue against Bush, who opposed the tax cut.

Sears, for his part, probed relentlessly for weaknesses in Bush's disciplined, risk-averse team. After a couple of weeks, Sears began an elaborate series of ploys revolving around a candidate debate scheduled for the Friday before primary day and sponsored by the *Nashua Telegraph*. First, the Reagan campaign proposed a debate involving only the two front-runners. The *Telegraph* and the Bush campaign eagerly accepted. Then, when the other four candidates actively campaigning in New Hampshire protested, Sears executed a sudden reversal, positioning Reagan as the candidate of inclusion, while the Bush campaign and the newspaper attempted to stick to the earlier agreement. All of the other candidates, together with much of the press, began attacking Bush as a snob and elitist for—what? For having accepted Sears's original proposal for a two-man debate and sticking to it.

I was not on the 1980 campaign staff, but in late 1979 Sears and his chief deputy, Charlie Black, fired Reagan's

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Madison Avenue advertising firm. Black called me and asked me to supervise the making of new commercials centering around Reagan's advocacy of an across-the-board 30 percent cut in federal income tax rates, modeled on advertising themes I had used in a Senate run two years earlier in New Jersey. By the time I flew to Los Angeles with Philadelphia ad man Elliot Curson in late January to make the new spots, Reagan had lost Iowa.

Reagan had been attracted to supply-side arguments long before they bore that label, and had praised Jack Kemp's proposed tax cut from the time it was unveiled in 1977. But more than anyone else, it was Sears who pushed the tax cut as a centerpiece of 1980 strategy and had promoted Kemp's increasing prominence among Reagan's advisers, over considerable opposition from Sears's critics in California and elsewhere.

I arrived in North Andover, Massachusetts, the site of the hotel being used by the Reagan traveling party, on the weekend before the primary to take part in the final drilling of Reagan for the Nashua debate. I was unaware of much that had been happening. In quick succession, I learned that the campaign's private polling showed that the tax-cut spots were working; that Reagan had retaken the lead over Bush in the state by about 10 points; and that Sears, Black, and Lake had something else up their sleeve which they couldn't or wouldn't tell me about. This was underlined by their absence from the briefing session with Reagan.

Already encouraged by what I had heard, I was elated by Reagan's performance in the debate drill. He was at the top of his game, confident and well-versed on the issues, foreign and domestic, that had been thrown at him by the 20 or so staff members and outside advisers sitting around a large conference table.

I sought out Sears to tell him how impressive the candidate had been. Sears fixed me with a withering, almost angry smile, and said with unmistakable sarcasm, "Is that right?" He walked away without another word. Only then did it hit me that Sears was so alienated from Reagan that he seemed incapable of accepting good news about him.

At the Nashua debate that night, Sears sprang his final trap on Bush by orchestrating the appearance of the four also-ran candidates. As is well remembered, Reagan uttered the legendary line, "I paid for this microphone, Mr. Green," while Bush froze. Though it wasn't televised and New Hampshire voters saw no more than a few sound bites, Reagan devastated Bush in the debate.

On primary day, the tense, tight Reagan-Bush primary collapsed into a rout, 50 to 23 percent in favor of Reagan. The nomination fight was effectively over. Before the polls closed, Reagan called in Sears and his top lieutenants, Black and Lake, and fired them on the spot. William Casey was named the new campaign manager, and Reagan's California team returned, one by one, to the inner circle.

Sears's stormy partnership with Reagan was at an end, ironically at the absolute peak of its success, yet irreparable. But the fundamental question between them—was Reagan adequately preparing himself to run for president and, ultimately, to be president?—was to continue in one form or another, without Sears, for the rest of that campaign, indeed for the rest of Reagan's career.

That October, most of Reagan's advisers vehemently opposed allowing him to debate one-on-one with President Jimmy Carter, fearing the worst. James Baker, who had been the campaign manager for Reagan's principal opponents in the nomination fights of 1976 and 1980, argued that Reagan should debate Carter. He was right and wound up as Reagan's White House chief of staff. In 1984, White House aide Richard Darman was attacked for "overbriefing" Reagan for his first debate with Walter Mondale, on the unstated assumption that Reagan, by then at 73 the oldest president ever, was not up to absorbing much if any information. And prior to almost every G-7 or superpower summit Reagan attended, State Department and other officials were invariably heard to complain that Reagan would be taken to the cleaners if he didn't pay more attention to *their* briefing books.

At this remove, it is easier to understand why Nixon needed and used his briefing book than why Reagan had so little interest in his. Nixon had a gift for absorbing details but no overarching belief system. To him each question was independent of every other and—given his view of his enemies—a potential land mine. He had a hunger to know and think through, as a discrete matter, every question that he and his advisers thought might arise. He lacked an ideological organizing principle to help him do this, so he needed the briefing book.

By contrast, Reagan held an intense, compelling vision of America and the world that did not seem to depend on detailed knowledge. The puzzle was famously summed up in eight words by one of his national security advisers, Robert McFarlane: "He knows so little and accomplishes so much."

Reagan's detractors have always put their emphasis on the first part of the sentence, his admirers on the second. But each side knows that the full McFarlane sentence has weight, as does the paradox at its heart.

What accounts for the paradox of Reagan? Isaiah Berlin's metaphor of the fox and the hedgehog—based on Archilochus' dictum that the fox knows many things and the hedgehog one big thing—offers one possible solution. Some politicians—Bill Clinton comes to mind—are clearly in the fox category. Reagan seems more like a hedgehog—

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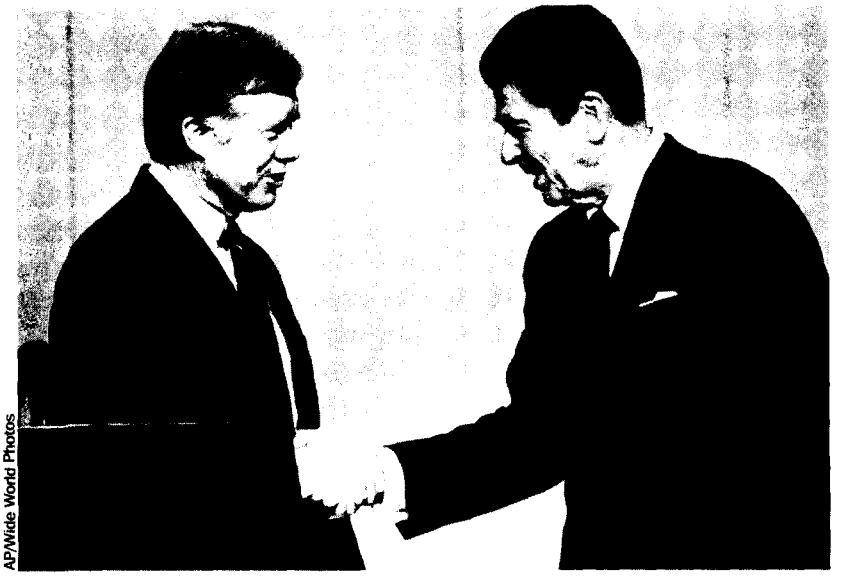

AP/Wide World Photos

Carter and Reagan, just before the October 28, 1980, debate

until you try to figure out what was the one big thing he knew. Was it that tax rates must come down? Or was it that the Soviet Union was far more fragile, far more vulnerable to outside pressure than anyone else realized? Or was it that Americans are still capable of seeing their country as a shining city on a hill, capable of changing the world by force of example and advocacy? It's hard to say.

What does seem to be the case is that Reagan had an extraordinarily high batting average on the judgment calls that came across his desk. He never seemed to know as much as his advisers about any one thing, but this didn't stop him from being right again and again, including on issues where all his advisers thought he was just this side of insane.

Reagan, for a political leader, had a unique way of looking at politics. Most politicians love political gossip. Reagan had no interest in it. He didn't care who the chairman of the Ohio GOP was, or what he thought, or who he was sleeping with. Instead, Reagan would spend endless hours reading and answering his personal mail. When I was on his staff, I thought this was a waste of time. I now believe it was at the heart of his populism. It gave him a vivid window on how voters think. This may explain some of his success. But again and again, Reagan made the right call on subjects he never got mail about.

There are other theories about Reagan that verge on the mystical. The secular version is that he had extraordinary intuition, or luck. Reagan himself appeared to have genuine humility about his success, whether it was due to luck or something deeper. After his shooting in 1981, he seemed to feel that his life had been spared to do the will of God.

I believe Reagan's religious beliefs gave him an extraordinary inner peace, and theology teaches us that God can use human beings to work his will. But even if true, what was it about Reagan that made this so difficult to see while it was happening? The other indisputable world-historical figure of the era, Pope John Paul II, has no less humility and no less willingness to serve God. But I have never met anyone who was in the immediate presence of the pope who doubted that he was in the presence of greatness. And I doubt many people who saw Winston Churchill at close range between 1940 and 1945 were oblivious to his extraordinary political gifts. What gave the seemingly far less gifted, far less sophisticated Reagan his political edge?

I find myself going back to Reagan's political ideology, which was post-World War II American conservatism. Is there a possibility that this belief system gave Reagan an effective tool, a framework that enabled him to make good decisions without a lot of particular knowledge—without a detailed briefing book?

At first glance this seems absurd, especially in view of the widespread suspicion that this ideology has cracked up, has run its course, however well it may have been suited to its time. After all, if ideology was key, shouldn't Reagan have had more in the way of imitators and successors? But none of the major politicians who succeeded, or attempted to succeed, Reagan on the national scene has had his combination of beliefs. Those who shared his economics have almost always played down his social conservatism. Those who shared his social beliefs have tended to lack his optimism about America's role in the world.

Perhaps that is more the fault of his successors than of his ideology. It is striking that the unfinished parts of Reagan's agenda have an odd way of bubbling back to the surface. Consider: Today's major debate in foreign and defense policy is deployment of the Strategic Defense Initiative. And if Reagan's reduction of the top tax rate from 70 to 28 percent was the greatest policy event of the 1980s, the repeal of the federal welfare entitlement will almost certainly be remembered as the biggest (and most surprising) policy event of the 1990s. The second event has as much a Reaganite stamp as the first.

At a national governors' conference in the early 1970s, a motion was offered to have Washington completely take over Aid to Families with Dependent Children. The motion carried, 49 to 1. Reagan, of course, was the no vote. He argued that, instead, the program should be returned completely to the states. When this more or less happened, more than two decades later under President Bill Clinton, the prime legislative strategist for the decentralizers was

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Robert Carleson—the man who had served as Reagan's commissioner of welfare in California.

Is this all simple happenstance? Or is it possible Reagan operated from an ideological framework that is deeply relevant and persuasive—and that is, or could be, as alive today as it was in the 1980s, when he came to dominate the politics of the nation and the world?

Beginning in the 1950s and continuing through his presidency, Reagan was a voracious consumer of conservative ideas, often through his subscriptions to *Human Events* and *National Review*. He was a follower of classical economics and supported the gold standard. He scoffed at the mythical "trust fund" often claimed for Social Security and favored a voluntary system. He was always attracted to a simple, low-rate tax system and to decentralization of programs being handled badly by Washington.

Reagan had no interest in the isolationist strain that dominated postwar conservatism in the 1940s and early 1950s. He never lost the Wilsonian commitment to the spreading of American democracy he held in his years as an active Democrat. As an alumnus of the (anti-Communist) Hollywood left, he resonated to the view of the world held by former Communists like Frank Meyer, men and women whose messianic devotion to saving the world through revolution had been transferred to a commitment to America as an idea. Needless to say, this ambitious, optimistic brand of conservatism is a polar opposite to the older strain of pessimistic, quasi-aristocratic European conservatism exemplified by thinkers like Russell Kirk.

Influenced though he was by libertarian thought in economics, Reagan in political office was a strong supporter of state and police power on behalf of the social order. Legalization of narcotics, and the guaranteed annual income as a substitute for welfare—proposals flirted with by many libertarian-leaning conservatives—held no appeal for him.

On social issues, Reagan was firmly on the side of traditional values. He felt he had been sold a bill of goods when he signed what proved to be a permissive abortion law in his first year as governor in 1967, and he became fervently pro-life in the years following *Roe* v. *Wade* in 1973. He caused the first strongly pro-life plank to be inserted in the Republican platform in 1980, and as president even published a pro-life book, *Abortion and the Conscience of the Nation*, in 1984. A few days before he left office, Reagan told the *New York Times* that his greatest regret about his presidency was that he was unable to do more to protect the unborn, and said that America will not be "completely civilized" as long as abortion is legal.

Reagan was quite capable of using the bully pulpit, and often spoke of the need for cultural renewal, but I agree with one of his biographers, Dinesh D'Souza, that "he would not have endorsed the right's effort to achieve this end by abjuring the use of state power. . . . Reagan understood that the way to change the culture is to change law and public policy."

While the view of Reagan as a great communicator is incontestable, I have come to believe that it is profoundly misleading. The picture we are invited to have is that Reagan was such a superb speaker that he could get people to believe virtually anything. Once he left the political scene, this logic goes, his views resumed their status as bizarre or extreme, losing their relevance to serious political debate.

I believe the truth is very different. The striking thing to me, thinking back about what it was like to work with Reagan when he was making political decisions, is not how persuasive he was at the time, but how often he proved to be right in retrospect. His judgment on matters of substance was astoundingly good, including and perhaps especially on matters where his advisers and others around him were completely unpersuaded, in not a few cases completely baffled.

Impressive as Reagan's communications skills were, in other words, his decisions about what to communicate were even better. This most certainly included his leadership of the diverse, inchoate movement of revolt against the left that we have come to know as the postwar conservative movement. Reagan invariably gravitated toward the aspects of American conservatism that were optimistic not cynical, populist not elitist, egalitarian not hierarchical, moral not relativistic—in short, toward what is distinctively American in American conservatism.

At the end of this road was the vision that moved Ronald Reagan most of all: America as a shining city on a hill, exerting magnetic power on the rest of the world. As D'Souza puts it, "his American exceptionalism was inextricably united with American universalism." And as a *Washington Post* editorial once noted in a rare moment of bemused respect, when Reagan ventured abroad he found not just the nation but the world was his oyster.

As we observe Reagan's 90th birthday on February 6, then, we should avoid nostalgia for what it was like to serve under a great leader: Most of us didn't know he was at the time. Or for the unity of purpose Reagan's leadership supposedly provided: Many of us on Team Reagan often found ourselves at each other's throats.

Above all, we should put to rest the idea of the Great Communicator: What Reagan told the American people about who we are, or who we should be, resonated far more deeply than any inflection of his voice. And we should therefore stop assuming that his success is unrepeatable. If we, American conservatives, take his belief system seriously, as a guide to the challenges of the present as well as the past, the greatest successes of the Reagan era may still lie ahead of us. ♦

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Covering the Gipper

One of Reagan's great advantages was that he didn't care for or about members of the press.

By Fred Barnes

Ronald Reagan had an unusual way of dealing with reporters and columnists: He transcended them. He didn't complain about what they wrote or said on TV. At least I never heard that he had. He didn't flatter them, as some politicians do, by pretending to admire their work, in hope they'd produce puff pieces about him. So far as I know, he didn't have friends in the Washington press corps and didn't want any. I think the press—with a few exceptions such as Bob Novak, Lou Cannon, and George Will—was a blur to him.

This was a gift, not a shortcoming. It drove journalists crazy, particularly the few conservative ones, because they crave recognition as individuals, distinct from the pack. But the chief effect of Reagan's obliviousness was to empower him. Since he didn't worry about the press, his presidency and his campaigns were not shaped by media coverage. He felt no need to pander to the press. His aides were often thrown into a tizzy by critical stories, especially in the *Washington Post*. But Reagan wasn't. He was free to pursue policies and say things the press was sure to loathe. He was free to be Reagan.

Reagan and reporter Barnes, October 2, 1987

I mention Reagan's treatment of the press to help explain my own relationship with him. Actually, relationship overstates it. Except for a few fleeting interludes, I was part of the blur. Of course I thought I was different. Almost from the first time I covered Reagan in the 1976 Republican presidential primaries, I generally agreed with him. Few reporters did. Not that my stories in the *Washington Star* reflected any agreement. They contained little more than cold-blooded reporting, as they should have. In any case, if Reagan noticed a difference between me and the pack, he didn't let on.

Reagan in 1976 was the most exciting candidate I've ever seen. I covered him when he was denouncing the "giveaway" of the Panama Canal and racking up primary victories. Crowds would go berserk when he declared the United States had bought, built, and should keep the canal. I disagreed with him on this point. But looking back and knowing now how the Panamanians have trashed U.S. facilities in the Canal Zone, I suspect he was right.

Reagan didn't give a single bad speech in 1976, not one that I covered anyway. This was no accident. Jim Lake, his press secretary, told me years later he was chewed out by Reagan only once, and that was for interrupting while Reagan was going over the stump speech he was about to deliver for the umpteenth time. Reagan cared about his words. At the 1976 GOP convention, President Gerald Ford delivered the best speech of his career. But Reagan's against-the-grain concession speech about eliminating nuclear weapons was better. Over the years, I've been surprised at how few politicians have copied Reagan's style. He told compelling stories and twitted himself with self-deprecating humor, and people loved it. Maybe other politicians just have no self-deprecating thoughts.

As a reporter for the *Baltimore Sun* in 1980, I mostly covered Democrats. But I saw Reagan tell one of his most famous and mesmerizing stories (even if it doesn't bear

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fact-checking). It was at Liberty University in Virginia, and Reagan recounted the experience of a wounded tail-gunner pinned in a bomber as it hurtled to earth. The pilot stayed behind to comfort the young man and to die with him. Reagan ended the story something like this, speaking of the pilot: "Medal of Honor, awarded posthumously." The crowd went silent, and Reagan soon left the stage. It was a stunning moment, exceeded in the power of its patriotism only by Reagan's speech at Omaha Beach on D-Day in 1984. By the way, watching even a brief clip of the D-Day speech still makes grown men tear up.

I got closer to Reagan in 1984. I was invited with five other journalists for a late afternoon chat, off the record. I'm sure this wasn't Reagan's idea. And I don't know why I was invited. Maybe somebody on Reagan's staff had noticed I'd begun writing freelance pieces for the conservative *American Spectator* while still covering politics for the *Sun*. Reagan operated on the assumption that nothing is really off the record in Washington. So he said nothing newsworthy or even interesting. He wouldn't say what he thought of Walter Mondale, his Democratic opponent.

Later in 1984, I was part of the worst night of Reagan's career, the first presidential debate with Mondale. Reagan, in preparing, had overdosed on details and didn't play up the conservative themes that had always served him well. Mondale had the greatest night of his life. I was a panelist (along with Diane Sawyer of ABC and Jim Weighart of the New York *Daily News*), chosen after dozens of others were vetoed by the campaigns. My theory is that the best questions are ones you really want to hear the answer to. This ruled out the budget deficit and a lot of other tedious topics. My friend Tom DeFrank, now Washington bureau chief of the New York *Daily News*, suggested I ask Reagan why he didn't go to church. I asked exactly that.

The question, in my humble view, turned out to be better than the answer. The Reagan people in the audience didn't agree. They hissed when I asked it. I thought my question was airtight, mentioning the possibility of bringing a preacher to the White House or Camp David. Reagan ignored all that and said he didn't go to church for security reasons, to protect both him and the church (from being blown up by terrorists). Reagan was totally off his game. Afterwards, I approached him to shake hands. He knew he'd done poorly and looked stricken. I asked if he thought the questions were softballs. "No, not really," he said. Mondale, meanwhile, was grinning so broadly he couldn't talk. In the next debate, Reagan made that joke about Mondale's age, and won going away.

I didn't normally attend presidential press conferences, since that was the job of full-time White House reporters. And Reagan didn't have many. When he did, there was a ritual that was fun to watch. Reagan would give the planned answer to a question, then continue talking. If you looked around at the White House staff lining the wall behind the reporters, you'd see a look of terror cross their faces as Reagan went into uncharted territory. Reagan usually emerged unscathed. What the press declared a gaffe often wasn't. Reporters thought calling Vietnam a "noble cause" was a gaffe. The public thought otherwise.

The truth is Reagan's aides worried too much. As candidate and president, Reagan was amazingly disciplined. I was thrilled in 1986 to be invited to lunch with Reagan in the small study next to the Oval Office. This wasn't Reagan's idea but Pat Buchanan's. Buchanan was communications czar at the White House, and I was writing the White House Watch column for the *New Republic*. The lunch was off the record, but I figured I'd pick up some fascinating tidbits I could leverage into pieces. I was sadly mistaken. Reagan told great Errol Flynn stories and one about director Ernst Lubitsch's subtle way of dealing with sex in movies, but not much else. The worst part was I'd heard him tell the same Lubitsch story at the afternoon session in 1984.

For some reason, I was granted an interview with Reagan in 1987, in the aftermath of Iran-Contra. I guess it was supposed to be part of Reagan's political recovery. Press secretary Marlin Fitzwater and Tom Griscom, Buchanan's replacement as communications director, sat in as Reagan's minders. Reagan was in fine fettle. I'd brought a photograph of him taken in 1937 in Monterey, California, with a group of extras—including my grandmother—from a movie he was making. I asked if Reagan remembered the film. He instantly named the movie, *Sergeant Murphy*, outlined the plot, and recalled being tricked into riding a wild horse one day after filming was done. I was impressed.

Fitzwater and Griscom weren't. Reagan had been cajoled by his aides into saying that the sale of weapons to Iran was, in effect, an arms-for-hostages deal. This line was supposed to satisfy the press and put an end to the scandal. The problem was Reagan didn't believe it. "It was not trading arms for hostages," he told me, contradicting what he'd said in a nationally televised speech six months earlier. He was merely trying to influence the government that would succeed the man he called "the Khomeini." I glanced at Fitzwater and Griscom as Reagan spoke. They had that look of terror I'd seen on the face of Reagan aides at press conferences. The White House often releases transcripts of private interviews, but not this time.

I last saw Reagan in 1988 at the White House Christmas party. I went through the receiving line with my wife Barbara and shook hands with Reagan and Nancy. He gave no indication of knowing who I was. I was part of the

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A Democratic Statesman

By Irving Kristol

December 7, 1988

As Ronald Reagan prepares to leave the White House, he also leaves those of us who study American politics and American history with an interesting question: What is it that has made him so successful a president—indeed so successful a democratic statesman?

A successful democratic statesman is one whose tenure in office is seen by his countrymen as representing a permanent contribution to the shaping of our democratic destiny. He is viewed as having expanded democratic horizons while nourishing the democratic spirit and reinforcing the popular commitment to self-government.

It is astonishing how few such presidents we have had. And it is surprisingly difficult to isolate the qualities that distinguish those few, as against the others.

Apart from the Founding Fathers, who were a special case, I think there have been only four truly successful democratic presidents who were also democratic statesmen: Abraham Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Ronald Reagan. There have been other very good presidents, of course, and other estimable presidencies, but—and it may just have been a case of unpropitious circumstances—none that achieved this particular distinction.

Ronald Reagan, I think it is fair to say, is the president who has inaugurated the post-New Deal era in American history. Not by repudiating the past—Americans are very traditional people who do not repudiate their past easily. This attachment to tradition is the main anchor of democratic stability, no matter how turbulent the times or how frenetic our politics.

No, what Ronald Reagan has done is to incorporate our past into a new perspective on the American future, of which he has given us the outlines. Only the outlines—perhaps out of courtesy to his vice president and our president-elect, he has left us with much filling-in to do. But the outlines are clear enough—a rediscovery of the importance of individual self-reliance, without which programs incorporating political compassion end up in perpetual frustration; a renewed emphasis on those moral values that bind individuals to their families and communities and that give ultimate meaning to their lives; an affirmation of individual enterprise, energized by low rates of taxation, as the key to economic growth; and, perhaps most important, a revival of that spirit of patriotism that enables Americans to confront the world with a vigorous self-confidence that we once seemed to have lost forever.

And it is not only in the United States that he has inaugurated this new era, but for much of the world as well. The impact of his presidency is being felt within the Communist world and in the nations of the developing world, as well as the democracies—something no one would have thought possible only a few years ago. In nation after nation, a new economic environment is emerging. In accomplishing this, President Reagan has been not just a successful democratic statesman for the United States but an exemplar of the successful democratic statesman for his world. In this respect, he may be the very first.

So, thank you, Mr. President, for your service to our country and to our world. It has been a privilege to be a witness to your eight years in office. ♦

Irving Kristol is editor of the Public Interest. *He delivered this tribute at a 1988 American Enterprise Institute dinner in honor of Ronald Reagan.*

blur again. At that moment, I understood the feeling of unrequited love experienced by so many Reagan aides. They'd admired him, worked for him, expected to bond with him, but found him detached. And when they stopped working for him, they never heard from Reagan again.

I did hear from him again. In 1990, I wrote a piece for *Reader's Digest* on the collapse of communism. It gave Reagan some credit, but didn't say he'd personally won the Cold War. Several months later, I got a note from Reagan. He said he'd enjoyed the article and believed his policy had played a role. "I must admit that I was surprised by the speed with which things have been happening," he added, "but I never doubted communism would eventually fail. In fact, it never really worked." In closing, he invited me to drop by if I came to Los Angeles. I never did. Now, on the eve of Reagan's 90th birthday, I wish I had, just to distinguish myself from the blur. ♦

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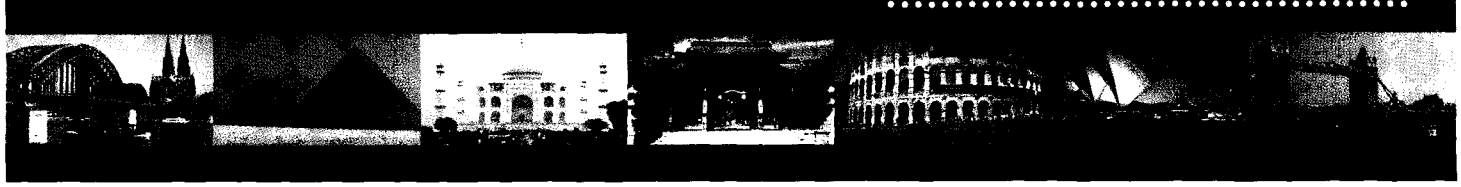

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Voice of America

Reagan on the radio

BY ANDREW FERGUSON

In time for his ninetieth birthday, the Free Press is bringing out the writings of Ronald Reagan—nearly 550 pages worth, heavily annotated in very small type—and the inescapable question that confronts the reader as he slogs along is, "Why?" A readable and judicious selection of Reagan's writing, drawn from different sources over a span of many years, would have been welcomed, probably, by Reagan's friends and foes alike, as a window into his political and intellectual development. But *Reagan, In His Own Hand* is what journalists call a document dump.

From early 1975, when he left office as governor of California, until late 1979 (not counting a year-long hiatus to run for president in 1976), Reagan rode the circuit as a speechmaker, published a twice weekly newspaper column, and syndicated a five-minute, five-day-a-week radio commentary. Ghostwriters took care of the newspaper columns, but as an old broadcaster Reagan enjoyed writing most of the radio scripts himself. According to the editors of *Reagan, In His Own Hand*, he wrote two thirds of the more than one thousand commentaries delivered in those years, scribbling away at his desk at home or as he traveled, in the first-class compartment of airplanes and the backseat of chauffeured cars. The handwritten drafts were retrieved not long ago from Reagan's personal papers.

And here they are. More than two hundred and fifty of them. A very long parade of four-hundred word essays, meticulously recreating in typescript Reagan's own crossovers, rewrites, marginalia, and emendations. Some of the pieces are charming, even touching in a way a politician's words seldom are. Some are compelling for their arguments or foresight. Others are mortally repetitive or too dated to be of interest to anyone but historians, and many are not only dated but dross. The editors give the general reader no hint as to which is which, and for most people the book will be tough sledding.

Reagan, In His Own Hand
The Remarkable Writings of Ronald Reagan that Show How He Created a Revolutionary Vision for America
edited by Kiron K. Skinner, Annelise Anderson, and Martin Anderson
Free Press, 544 pp., $30

Why are they all here then? You can't help but suspect that the editors wanted to impress their audience with the sheer mass of Reagan's late-1970s prose. The madness in their method comes clear in the first few pages of the introduction, whose reverential glow sometimes approaches parody: "When Reagan wrote, he didn't scribble or scrawl, he wrote in a clear script. When he reached the bottom of the legal pad, he carefully flipped the page over, tucked it in on the back side of the pad, and proceeded onto the second page."

Wow. No wonder America loved him. The introduction continues over the next eight paragraphs with comments from other Reagan employees:

> He was constantly writing. . . . But all the time he was writing. . . . He'd turn on his reading lamp and would constantly be writing. . . . Reagan would sit in the backseat with his legal pad, writing. . . . All the way up, Reagan would be writing. . . . He would be writing in the backseat when we drove back. . . . He was always just writing. . . . When I woke up, he'd still be working, just writing away. . . . You know, everyone's got things to do. And his thing was writing. . . .

Andrew Ferguson is a senior editor at THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

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All right already! He wrote, he wrote! But the crucial point here is that writing is an intellectual activity, the sign of an active mind. What they're being defensive about, these editors and former employees, is the image of Reagan held by the chattering class, from the late 1960s onward, that he was incapable of any intellectual activity more complicated than brushing his teeth. He was "an amiable dunce," in the famous words of Clark Clifford (who was, by contrast, an unctuous sleazeball). Reagan's image was reinforced—sometimes slyly, sometimes bitterly—by several memoirs published during and after his administration, in which the doddering, kind-hearted president was depicted by suave and clear-eyed staffers as utterly clueless about the most elemental aspects of his presidency. Reagan himself didn't help matters any. His ghost-written presidential memoir, *An American Life*, was a breezy greeting-card of a book that seemed pasted together from newspaper clippings and showed few signs of having been read by its putative author.

Reagan, In His Own Hand is thus part of what might be called the Reagan Reclamation Project, an attempt by the president's professional admirers to prove his detractors wrong, wrong, wrong. "Maybe he was a lot smarter than most people thought," George Shultz writes wryly, in an affectionate foreword to the book. Others go much further in their enthusiasm, all the way over the top. Mark Burson, the executive director of the Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation, says that *Reagan, In His Own Hand* "provides the most compelling evidence yet that the president was indeed a man of letters worthy of comparison to our Founding Fathers and their remarkable legacy—the Federalist Papers."

That "most compelling evidence yet" is a nice touch—as though lots of compelling evidence for the Reagan-Publius connection has already been piling up. Burson does his cause no good with these flights of fancy. Reagan (shouldn't it go without saying?) was no Madison or Hamilton or Jay, and his writings, as this new collection makes plain, fall rather short of the Federalist Papers. But so what? Reagan's admirers should be happy enough to take him on his own ground, which is the ground, after all, on which his detractors will have to deal with him, sooner or later. What *Reagan, In His Own Hand* does show is that quite apart from his accomplishments as president—which made him the most successful and consequential American politician of the second half of the last century—Reagan was an endearing and impressive man.

In or out of office, he was a publicist. The word has fallen on hard times, owing to the greasy exertions of the press agents and flacks and hired guns who call themselves publicists today. Reagan was a publicist in the earlier sense—a man of conviction whose job it was to make his beliefs palatable and persuasive to the general public, an intermediary between the world of ideas and the world the rest of us inhabit. The title "Great Communicator" is more than a pop historian's shorthand; he really was extraordinarily good at this, long before he surrounded himself with talented speechwriters and "communication specialists." He knew what he believed, he was unhindered by second-guessing, and he had the gifts of simplicity and compression. Together these made him a perfect tribune for the age of electronic media, which is impatient with elaborate argument. Here he is, with characteristic abbreviations, in a talk called "America's Strength," from December 1976:

> Our system freed the individual genius of man. Released him to fly as high & as far as his own talent & energy would take him. We allocate resources not by govt. decision but by the mil's. of decisions customers make when they go into the mkt. place to buy. If something seems too high-priced we buy something else. Thus resources are steered toward those things the people want most at the price they are willing to pay. It may not be a perfect system but it's better than any other that's ever been tried.

At the time Reagan was making this broadcast (if you'll forgive a personal note) I was enrolled in an introductory economics course, hacking my way through Paul Samuelson's famous textbook *Economics*. Into this brief, bracing passage, Reagan packed more truth about the marketplace and human behavior than Samuelson managed to fit into his hundreds and hundreds of turgid pages. But back in 1976, just about every sophisticated, cultured, thoughtful, well-educated—you get the idea—person assumed that Reagan's view of the market's virtues was a superstition that time and circumstance had transcended. Reagan persisted, of course. And unafraid to be thought "behind the times," he proved himself ahead of them.

The same holds true for his views on foreign policy. They were clear and uncomplicated, and all the more powerful for their clarity and lack of complication. A large percentage of these little essays deal with America's role in the world. In hindsight they can make for stirring reading—especially in hindsight. We've grown used in recent years to politicians reminding us how simple foreign policy was during the Cold War, how bright was the line between right and wrong, how self-evident was the course to be pursued against the Soviet Union. But the Cold War consensus they pretend to remember had vanished by 1965. They've forgotten (conveniently enough) how alarmed sophisticates were at Reagan's assertion of truths that later guided his presidency and helped bring the Cold War to a happy end.

On the radio he summed up his view as "peace through strength"—the commonsense belief that an adversary will be more cooperative if he's impressed by your military power and constancy of purpose. From this conviction came Reagan's call for a vastly increased military budget, his opposition to the return of the Panama Canal and SALT II treaty, and to the Helsinki Accords, and his rejection of the dispiriting orgy of negotiation and wishful thinking that had constituted foreign policy under Presidents Nixon, Ford, and Carter. Reagan devoted dozens of broadcasts to each topic. "Détente," he mused in 1975, "isn't that what a farmer has with his turkey—until thanksgiving day?" Polite people simply weren't supposed to talk like this in 1975: "Communism is neither an ec.

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or a pol. system—it is a form of insanity—a temporary aberration which will one day disappear from the earth because it is contrary to human nature. I wonder how much more misery it will cause before it disappears."

A publicist is a salesman of ideas, and Reagan's idea was freedom. It might be this preoccupation that dates the book more than anything else. You don't often hear the word anymore in our political conversation—scarcely at all, for example, in the presidential campaign just ended. In the Eminem era, Americans might be forgiven for thinking that their country suffers from too much freedom instead of not enough. Even George W. Bush, booming a tax cut that some of his supporters called "Reaganite," has chosen to rationalize his policy on the old, pre-Reaganite grounds of economic stimulus, rather than as a way of broadening freedom against the encroaching power of the state, or of reaffirming the right of free people to keep what they earn. The passion for freedom—from imperial forces abroad, from meddlers and do-gooders at home—has been drained from politics since Reagan left the scene.

Partly this is the fault of Reagan himself, a consequence of his success. It is easy to make the case that Reagan, though he campaigned as a Reaganite, didn't govern as one. In constant dollars, federal spending increased in the Reagan years by more than thirty percent; instead of eliminating two cabinet departments, as he had pledged to do, he added another one; in his final year he approved a new entitlement, catastrophic health insurance, that would have rivaled Medicare (it was later repealed). The list of heresies is long. But there's no denying his success on two broad fronts. First, by pursuing a foreign policy that accelerated the collapse of the Soviet Union, he allowed the political culture to redirect its attention to smaller matters; no politician thought to campaign against teen smoking when all those missiles were pointed at us. And second, by lowering tax rates and pressing the case for deregulation, he recast the relationship between the government and the market conclusively in favor of the market; the boom that followed is in its eighteenth year.

Reagan's success had an unintended effect. It rendered obsolete the ideological arguments around which he had built his political career—the arguments that animate these essays. Which gives the book a musty odor, the crinkly feel of an artifact. But that's okay, too. For all its bloat and redundancies, it is a valuable set of documents. It offers a new and unexpected measure of Reagan's greatness: His ideas were so persuasive, and they worked so well, that we've already forgotten them. ♦

Salter Flies Again

James Salter, America's best least-known novelist. **BY DAVID GELERNTER**

James Salter's novel *Cassada* tells a story that rushes toward you with the cool hellishness of a treetop-skimming jet fighter, then fills the sky overhead and is gone, leaving an unforgettable rustle of thunder uncoiling behind. It is a brilliant novel that in some ways resembles *The Great Gatsby*: a short book of lyrical tautness, not an extra syllable anywhere, concerning an outsider who is undone by a selfless act. It is about honor, aspiration, and nobility.

Counterpoint

Cassada
by James Salter
Counterpoint, 256 pp., $25

Cassada has to do with the spiritual meaning of technical mastery—in particular, mastery over warplanes. Few sorts of virtuosity demand more skill, brains, and bravery. The outsider is a young fighter pilot, a Puerto Rican who joins a U.S. squadron in Germany in the 1950s. According to Salter's foreword, *Cassada* is a rewritten version of his second novel, *The Arm of Flesh* (1961), which was "largely a failure." As Salter reports in his 1997 memoir, *Burning the Days*: "It disappeared without a trace."

His first novel, *The Hunters*, had succeeded with the public and critics in 1957 and helped convince the young author to bail out of his promising Air Force career to become a full-time writer. He tells the story in *Burning the Days*: the child of 1930s Manhattan; then a Jew at West Point, like his father—followed by pilot training, combat in Korea, and growing success as a career officer. After publication under a penname (his real name is Horowitz), he quit the Air Force. Years later, he is still "thinking every day of the life I had left, unable to stop recalling it or to believe in myself apart from it."

The career Salter abandoned was no routine affair. (The facts are clear despite his modesty and reserve, which give his memoir a strange tension—the author resolved to go on with his autobiography but fighting a tendency to turn away and quit remembering.) He volunteered for pilot training, then for fighters, then for combat. He flew more than a hundred combat missions, battling MiGs along the Yalu. He never mentions his decorations or promotions, but when he is temporarily recalled to active duty during the Berlin crisis, we catch a glimpse of him as a lieutenant colonel.

David Gelernter is a contributing editor to THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

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You would guess that he was destined for great things in the Air Force. You would guess also that Salter might concur, wistfully.

Once he was out of uniform, his artistic mastery continued to grow, but after *The Hunters* none of his books was much of a hit until *Burning the Days*. In the 1960s he became a screenwriter and director; once again early success petered out, and he went back to novels and stories. Many famous writers profess to admire him. Their blurbs decorate his paperbacks like advance funeral wreaths. But since *Cassada* was published several months ago, few reviews have appeared.

Cassada is a suspense story and a technical tour de force, with two narratives streaking forward simultaneously, to coalesce uncannily at the end. The story is a fantasia on the theme of trust among soldiers: its meaning and its beauty. The newcomer Lieutenant Cassada says to Captain Isbell (squadron operations officer, second in command): "If someone would only have a little confidence in me"—and Isbell grants him that confidence. Then one afternoon he and Cassada are flying together, Cassada on Isbell's wing; they stop at Marseilles, bound for home in Germany. They find that bad weather is closing in all over Europe. It seems imprudent to go on.

Cassada lacks bad-weather flying experience but Isbell does not, and Cassada tells him to go ahead: "I can fly your wing through any of that." So they go. In transit Isbell's radio fails. Isbell drops back and follows Cassada. Back in their home skies they try a tower-guided approach in heavy weather, but they are lined up wrong; they have to go around and try again. Cassada loses Isbell in the murk. He has only one chance of finding him, but his fuel is running out. He can try for a safe landing himself, or he can look for Isbell. Naturally this is, for Cassada, no choice at all.

What was the point? Why didn't they stay on the ground until the weather cleared? In part to establish their superiority as pilots. But Isbell is wise enough to resist this kind of temptation. Then why? Because this is the story of an extended salute: a salute offered by Cassada, returned by Isbell. The military provides the field for such exercises in honor but they are by no means taken for granted, and some soldiers who figure prominently in the story admit that they don't understand them.

So it is a story of honor, virtuosity, and bravery. It is about the vulnerability of those for whom honor matters, and the invulnerability of those for whom it does not.

Salter writes with lovely precision—about Cassada's pride, in the face of mockery, "drawn tighter around him, buttoned at the collar." He writes simply. "The trees had some wind in them. The branches quivered." He writes with the eloquent compressed power of pilot-talk. "Negative. I'm down to nine hundred pounds. I can't divert." The Air Force he writes about is a complex proposition—men with closed hostile faces who are competent and even dedicated but dishonorable, others who are thoughtful and humane, others who are prickly and tactless and can rebuff friendliness but who are full of warrior nobility.

The fictional world Salter assembles compels belief. "'What color did you say?' Isbell asked. 'Yellow,' Cassada repeated." A ten-word workshop in the art of the novel. The topic is gunnery practice, where pilots fire different colors at the airborne target so their hits can be identified. Isbell *had* to ask Cassada to repeat, because the first time Cassada spoke he had been murmuring "almost to himself, as if to cards or dice." And naturally Cassada had been murmuring that way: the shots have been fired but not yet counted; it is Cassada's first time out and he wants desperately to do well, but he can only wait and see. It's all merely natural, but it lets us see, also, that Isbell might be interested in Cassada—which turns out to be crucial to the story.

The relations between the story and the storyteller are important. For Cassada, virtuosity and daring as a pilot have something to do with nobility of character. Mastery isn't just a matter of technique, it is a psychological and artistic capacity for dominance.

Salter himself was a brilliant air force officer and is now a brilliant writer. The two activities may seem unrelated, but in his case they are closely linked. His prose has the daring, delicacy, and precise control that a fighter pilot ought to have. It also has a certain reticence—the distance and shyness of a man who is able to write intimate close-ups and

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does, but whose natural place is far overhead, alone, seeing the beauty of big patterns. His books have the focused intensity a fighter pilot would need. Breadth, however, is not a Salter characteristic. The same sorts of people recur, and the same places—Paris, Burgundy, and elsewhere in France; Rome; New York and its suburbs. Salter has a sense of humor, but keeps it on a short leash.

Plainly he ranks with Bellow and Updike among America's greatest living fiction writers. Magician-artist that he is, he conjures the right word repeatedly out of thin air; he is the master of the one-word image. In *A Sport and a Pastime* (1967), for instance, three Frenchmen sit at a provincial restaurant, "accepting the menus"—where "accepting" conveys a philosophy of eating and living, a whole culture. "Icicles fall from the roof, broken free by sunlight." Salter has the master-artist's gift of making the familiar seem strange and the strange, familiar. From *Light Years* (1975), he writes, "He lived in it helplessly as we live in our bodies when we are older." (To say "older" instead of "old" is typical Salter reticence.) His prose runs like caressing fingertips over a world full of mysterious beauty.

So why does Salter have so few readers? It is only fair to point out that his worldview is tragic. Nor is it headline news to find a distinguished artist who has failed to hit it big with the public. But Salter's unsuccess speaks badly for us.

In the memoir, he reports facts with his usual relentless cool. He mails out the first seventy-five pages of *Light Years*, which turns out to be his best novel: "As rejections came, one by one, I was stunned. I lay in bed at night wrapped in bitterness, like a prisoner whose appeal has failed."

Yet his art and his career moved forward, to inexorable muffled drumbeats. He has a character in *Light Years* say: "Happiness is not so easy to find, is it? . . . How frightening to be without it, to wait for happiness, to be patient, to be ready, to have your face upturned and luminous like girls at communion. Yes, you are saying to yourself, me, me, I am ready." The passage makes you shudder. ♦

Thomas Merton and Robert Lax, c. 1937. Image Books.

Men of Letters

The epistolary friendship of the monk Thomas Merton and the poet Robert Lax. BY RICHARD KOSTELANETZ

Thomas Merton and Robert Lax first met as undergraduates at Columbia in the mid-1930s, and they remained close friends throughout their lives. Though one was born Protestant and the other Jewish, both converted to Catholicism. Merton became a Trappist monk in 1941—the most famous monk in America, a poet and essayist, and the author of the bestselling conversion-tale *The Seven Storey Mountain*. Lax was an independent writer and poet who settled in the islands of Greece, where he lived until he returned to his family home in Olean, New York, to die last year, surviving Merton by more than thirty years.

When Prophecy Still Had A Voice
The Letters of Thomas Merton & Robert Lax
edited by Arthur W. Biddle
Univ. Press of Kentucky, 496 pp., $39.95

Now there has appeared *When Prophecy Still Had A Voice*, a collection of letters between the two. I'm not a great fan of such books, more than once finding the scholarly annotations more interesting than the primary texts. Little is more painful than reading an abundance of communications between people who were patently circumspect with each other, as, say, Thornton Wilder and Gertrude Stein were. But these letters from Merton and Lax are different—indeed, often brilliant. One reason is that neither seems to have felt the need to hold back from the other. A second reason is that both are master stylists: Merton inclining to garrulous elegance, Lax to conciseness.

Even in his early twenties, Merton has mastered his infectiously enthusiastic style:

> I went up to the Music Library having a hangover, and took Ionisation and put it on the thing with the earphones, and Chroust Chroust, it poured into my head so that it sounded like it was my brains falling about, the lobes moving from place to place and changing positions and when the fellow comes in that drops all the trays I thought I was dead and ran away screeching.

Elsewhere, he reflects the influence of James Joyce and Marshall McLuhan: "The Matterhorn is the Message and the modiste is the massage and Marshall MacLompoc is Mother Macree." Remember that such prose came from him unrevised, because his monastery commitments gave him only a few hours each week to write.

Another factor making this Merton-Lax correspondence unique is that the

Richard Kostelanetz recently completed a collection of his literary essays, Person of Letters in the Contemporary World.

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two college friends rarely saw each other as adults, living as they did in impecunious isolation on different sides of the world. So they remembered each other, and regarded each other, as brilliant young men well beyond that fact.

In his early fifties, for instance, Merton writes to Lax about their classmate, the painter Ad Reinhardt: "Just heard today by clipping from Schwester Therese about Reinhardt. Reinhardt he daid. Reinhardt done in. He die. Last Wednesday he die with the sorrows in the studio. Just said he died in a black picture he daid. The sorrows have said that he has gone into the black picture for he is dead." (Twenty years ago, Reinhardt's widow showed me some letters Merton had written her husband and repeated Reinhardt's line about the monk: "Taking the vow of silence, he wrote garrulous letters to his friends.")

Stylistically pushed, Lax responds only a week later: "I sit near the sea & almost fall into it from sorrow. & then I sit (as seldom enough we do) in a church & look at the black & grey squares of the tiles, till the spirit is somewhat mended. & then all through the whole dark night it is Reinhardt, Reinhardt."

Fascinating as these letters are, the book in which they appear is lamentably under-edited. The title of James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* often appears with the addition of the apostrophe that isn't in the original. Important figures aren't identified, while others have their names misspelled (beginning with sometime Washington literary magazine editor Bill Clare), making me wonder if it, and thus much else, was mistakenly transcribed.

More than once, the editor remarks that poems Lax incorporated into his letters are omitted—which is unfortunate, for Lax's pioneering experiments with poetic minimalism (mistakenly called "concrete poems" here) made him a "language poet" long before that term was coined. A headnote on page 407 says that Lax enclosed a snapshot he'd taken of Merton during their last visit. Since the photo is described as though it were seen firsthand, it should have been reprinted. Better notes would have identified, for example, "Ionisation" as Edgar Varèse's entirely percussive piece (and thus an odd cure for a college hangover). And is "Chroust" Christ or the Russian word for a crackling noise? The lack of an index seriously weakens the book.

My first thought was that *When Prophecy Still Had A Voice* could become a classic book for serious young people, much as Merton's *The Seven Storey Mountain* or Vincent Van Gogh's letters are favorites for certain readers. But then the editing deficiencies began to bother me. Unfortunately, the earlier volume of correspondence, *A Catch of Anti-Letters*, edited by Merton, is much too slight. Somewhere between these collections there is a book with the sustained quality that marks a classic—for Thomas Merton and Robert Lax were among the most intelligent, interesting, and engaging men of their time. ♦

Murder Everywhere

The rise of the regional American mystery novel.

BY JON L. BREEN

Detective fiction was born in Paris, where Edgar Allan Poe set "The Purloined Letter" and his other tales of C. Auguste Dupin. And it was reared in London, where Arthur Conan Doyle placed his adventures of Sherlock Holmes.

The American Regional Mystery
by Marvin Lachman
Crossover, 542 pp., $50

These pioneers influenced their successors not only in narrative conventions and structural techniques but also in the use of urban backdrops. There were notable exceptions (Melville Davisson Post placed his Uncle Abner tales in rural nineteenth-century Virginia), but for most practitioners, fictional detection remained a city game—and a very small set of cities, at that. For decades, the vast majority of American mystery novels were set in New York or Los Angeles. Occasionally Chicago, San Francisco, Boston, or Miami might make an appearance, but Indianapolis, Seattle, and Cleveland were out of luck.

Even the few cities that did appear proved interchangeable: The corpse in the library could be found in the wealthy enclaves of any metropolis; the body in the back alley could be found just off the poor streets of any city. The New York of S.S. Van Dine and the early Ellery Queen lacked much local detail. The characters in Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon* (1930), though surrounded by creeping fog and San Francisco street names, could have played out their quest for the Black Bird anywhere—as proved by the number of mysteries given purely fictitious locales: When Ed McBain, for example, created the 87th Precinct for his series of novels that began in 1956, he set them in a New York-ish city called "Isola," so he wouldn't have to keep track of every change in Manhattan police procedure.

Few writers today would choose a similar route. Lilian Jackson Braun is an exception: Pickax, the central city in her cat mysteries, is "anywhere you want it to be." But most mystery stories nowadays let you know on the first page exactly where they're set—and never let up. The current mystery scene might almost be defined as local detail run wild. You want Akron? We got Akron. We got Albany, Albuquerque, Amarillo, Anchorage, Annapolis, Atlanta, and Augusta. Something interesting has happened to American mystery fiction.

The winner of two Edgar awards, Jon L. Breen is the author of six mystery novels and writes the "Jury Box" column in Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine.

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The increase in regional detail came gradually. With *The Big Sleep* in 1939, Raymond Chandler gave a vivid portrait, both admiring and jaded, of Los Angeles. The mature Ellery Queen brought a terrorized New York to life in the serial-killer classic *Cat of Many Tails* (1949). A.B. Cunningham's Sheriff Jess Roden series, published throughout the 1940s, was firmly set in rural Kentucky, while Phoebe Atwood Taylor made distinctive use of her Cape Cod background in the series of 1930s and 1940s novels about Asey Mayo. Dorothy Salisbury Davis's *The Clay Hand* (1950) memorably depicted the West Virginia coal-mining country.

Tony Hillerman

Harper & Row

Introducing a 1963 reprint of the Davis novel, the *New York Times*'s influential mystery critic Anthony Boucher expressed a desire for "more regionalism in the American suspense novel." He got his wish, in spades—among other things, by inspiring Marvin Lachman to undertake the research that has now finally been issued in a classic study, *The American Regional Mystery*. The book is a tour of the United States via its crime fiction, beginning with New England and moving westward. In its 542 pages, every state is represented, with additional entries on Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and the District of Columbia. Unsurprisingly, New York and California have the largest number of entries, while Delaware and North Dakota have the smallest.

For the most part Lachman sticks to fictional crime, though there are often references to real-life murder cases and occasional references to true-crime books, such as Edward D. Radin's *Lizzie Borden: The Untold Story* (1961), set in Fall River, Massachusetts. Though names like Joyce Carol Oates and Shelby Foote turn up in the index, Lachman confines himself primarily to the mainstream mystery. (The chapter on Maine, for instance, has no reference to horror specialist Stephen King, most of whose works are at least borderline crime fiction.)

Few commentators have the breadth of knowledge, soundness of judgment, and writing talent of Lachman. In large crime-fiction reference books, I can usually find a multitude of errors, but Lachman's are frustratingly rare. (The best I could do is the niggling error that actor George Sanders was the detective in only one of the two ghost-written novels published under his name, and I'm pretty sure Lachman's claim, also made by Stuart M. Kaminsky, that Los Angeles's smog was a common butt of radio jokes in 1940 is almost a decade too early.)

It's easy for a traditionalist to be cynical about the current regionalist explosion. At a time when detective-story writers seem to outnumber readers, newcomers need to find a niche—and, far too often, it's a previously untapped geographical background. Then, too, with major publishing conglomerates favoring potential bestsellers over midlist titles, longer and longer books are being demanded. You have to fill all those extra pages with something. Unnecessary characters, repetition of plot points, irrelevant personal details, and columns of sentence-fragment dialogue can only get you so far. So why not throw in some regionalism and local color?

Indeed, "local color" proves a better description than "regionalism." *The Oxford Companion to American Literature* defines local color as emphasizing "customs, dialect, costumes, landscape, or other peculiarities that have escaped standardizing cultural influences." Regionalism "differs from local color in that it lays less stress upon quaint oddities of dialect, mannerism, and custom and more on basic philosophical or sociological distinctions."

If, as this definition implies, local color is incidental and regionalism organic, then most of the titles discussed by Lachman are examples of local color rather than regionalism. The great era of local color and regionalism in American fiction was at its peak in the years after the Civil War, dominated by such writers as Bret Harte, Kate Chopin, Joel Chandler Harris, Hamlin Garland, and Sarah Orne Jewett. Regional differences in America have been in decline ever since.

Tony Hillerman's novels of Navajo tribal police are closely involved with the unique beliefs of their characters and thus could take place nowhere else. The Salt Lake City mysteries of Robert Irvine take their particularity from the pervasive influence of the Mormon Church on Utah life. But—despite their riot of superficial local color—most contemporary big-city thrillers could be transplanted to any other big city, just as most small-town whodunits could pack up and move to any other small town, with only minor changes.

So which of these thousands of local mysteries should we bother with? Lachman's comments for the most part are descriptive rather than critical: If you live in Wisconsin and want to find a list of books set nearby, *The American Regional Mystery* is the place to go. But Lachman includes enough expressed or implied criticism to give some zest to the enterprise.

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Phyllis A. Whitney, still active in her late nineties, is perhaps the most conscientious and certainly the widest ranging American mystery regionalist. Lachman repeatedly praises her impeccable research into such locales as Palm Springs (*Emerald*), Monterey (*The Flaming Tree*), East Hampton (*The Golden Unicorn*), Palm Beach (*Poinciana*), the Blue Ridge Mountains (*Rainbow in the Mist*), Hawaii (*Silversword*), Newport (*Spindrift*), San Francisco (*The Trembling Hills*), and Sedona, Arizona (*Vermilion*).

Lachman's book may revive interest in such once-famous writers as the often devalued old-timer Leslie Ford, whose variety of locales may be second only to Whitney's. Ford's racial attitudes don't always please Lachman, but she provided solid regional detail of Washington (*The Murder of a Fifth Columnist*), rural Tennessee (*Burn Forever*), the Chesapeake Bay (*Ill Met by Moonlight*), Baltimore (*The Girl from the Mimosa Club*), Hawaii (*Honolulu Story*), Mississippi (*Murder with Southern Hospitality*), Philadelphia (*The Philadelphia Murder Story*), Reno (*Reno Rendezvous*), and Yellowstone (*Old Lover's Ghost*).

Two other rediscoveries winning Lachman's praise are Doris Miles Disney's tales of Connecticut and Juanita Sheridan's account of Hawaii. Among the contemporaries Lachman most values are Archer Mayor (Vermont), John Dunning (the Amish country in Pennsylvania), Bill Crider (Texas), Margaret Maron (North Carolina), the late Robert Campbell (Chicago), and Carl Hiaasen (Florida). These, of course, are expected recommendations. The greatest benefit of Lachman's work may be the relatively obscure writers he commends, such as Richard Hilary, whose series about an African-American private eye in Newark is proclaimed as good as Walter Mosley's Easy Rawlins series. Margaret Page Hood is credited with "the first good contemporary series about Maine," John Billheimer's *The Contrary Blues* is "West Virginia's best mystery," and Thomas Lipinski's private eye series "may prove to be the best of all about Pittsburgh."

To purists, the short story is the natural vehicle for fictional detection; indeed the first great writer of American regional mysteries, Melville Davisson Post, almost invariably wrote in that form. Lachman values the mystery short story more than most commentators, and he recommends a group of writers from *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine* who are unlikely to be familiar to most readers: David K. Harford on the Allegheny National Forest; William T. Lowe on the Mohawk reservation that borders Quebec; Marianne Strong on the Pennsylvania coal country; and Kenneth Gavrell on Puerto Rico.

Lachman's negative comments are less frequent. A longtime resident of the Bronx, he is most critical of mysteries set in his former home. Bob Reiss and Jerome Charyn are charged with exaggerating the borough's unattractive aspects, while Richard Fliegel is faulted for lack of regional detail. (Lachman prefers the Bronx mysteries of S.J. Rozan and Tom Philbin.) Richard Parrish, author of a series set in mid-century Arizona Indian country, is accused of anachronism. Richard Ellington is reproached for racist attitudes toward Puerto Ricans in a 1950 novel, and Elliot Paul for stereotyped Indians in the 1940s. The authors of more recent books, Stephen Wright and Tom Tolnay, are both charged with questionable taste in their use of real-life Hollywood celebrities in fiction.

One of the most negative assessments in the book is reserved for Caleb Carr's 1994 bestseller about Theodore Roosevelt and New York in the 1890s, *The Alienist*, in which "unnecessary history lessons" and anachronisms "pad the novel to 597 pages."

The complaint reflects the final cautionary note of Lachman's introduction: "By the 1990s, settings were sometimes described in such great detail as to become intrusive and were poor substitutes for strong plotting and story telling. There is a danger that if detective fiction continues to emphasize lengthy description and depressingly serious subject matter, readers who originally chose the genre for intelligent escape may desert it."

Still, even the traditionalist will admit a well-realized geographical setting can add entertainment value to a mystery novel. It can also educate and enlighten. The most respected of contemporary American regionalists, Tony Hillerman, whose books have been used as school texts on the Navajo country, achieved this stature without padding his books with irrelevant information and without retreating from the features that make detective fiction a unique genre. Writers of regional mysteries could not find a better model. ♦

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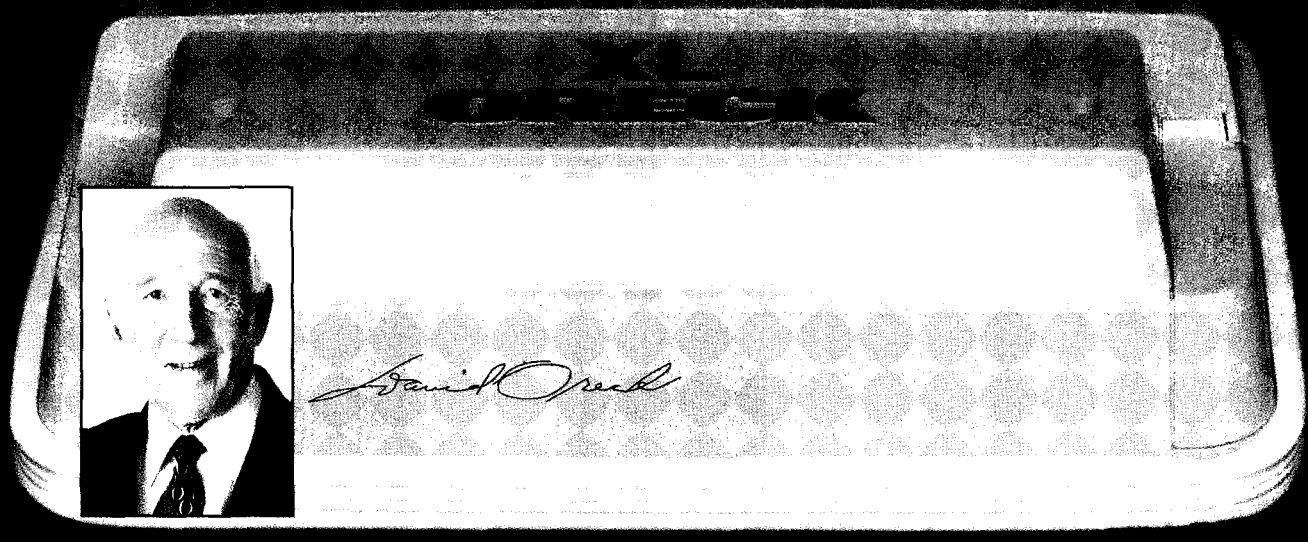

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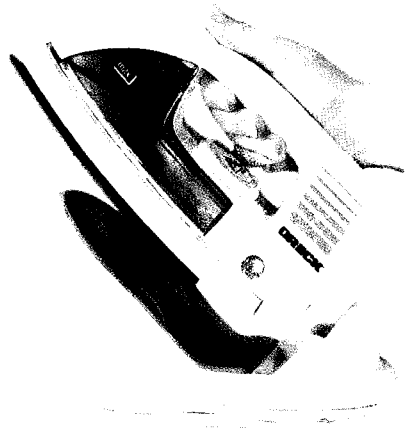

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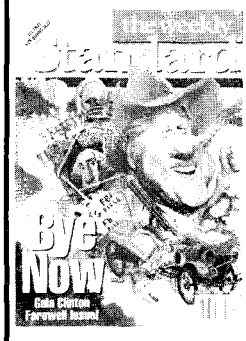

Thomas Fluharty's fine illustration for the cover of our January 15 issue appeared on newsstands January 8. Eleven days later, the Clintons disclosed the $190,027 in "gifts" they were taking with them—gifts that turned out to include any number of the items depicted below. Life imitates art . . .

the weekly Standard
February 5, 2001

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Character Education the Right Way

William Damon is a senior fellow, Hoover Institution; director, Stanford Center on Adolescence; and professor of education, Stanford University.

Amid the clamor of our recent presidential contest, the mass media coverage ignored one clear difference between the major candidates. The contrast may seem undramatic, but it could prove to be the most consequential issue of all for the future of our children, which is to say the future of our society. The issue is character education, and the candidate who spoke up for it is our new president. This means that we may anticipate renewed national attention to the fostering of virtue and moral commitment among the young.

The attention will be welcome. Yet it must be accompanied by sound strategy if it is to produce results. **Many areas of education today have been debased by fuzzy thinking, low standards, and a feel-good, anything-goes mentality.** Character education is no exception.

In my visits to schools across the country, I have seen much lip service paid to "good values" and many skin-deep programs that ask students to recite virtuous words such as honesty, temperance, and respect. I also have seen adults promoting the very behaviors that they are supposedly warning children against. I have heard teachers tell students that they don't blame them for cheating on tests that are unfair or meaningless. I have heard of sex education programs that instruct students in the use of contraceptives. I have observed adults who counsel underage minors about alcohol abuse by telling them to stay within a one-drink-per-hour limit.

Such ambivalent messages make a mockery out of character education. Children are brilliant at picking up subtexts, and they love to explore the half-forbidden. Any instruction that begins "I'd rather not have you do this, but if you are going to anyway, be sure to..." is an irresistible invitation to give it a full-throttle try. The only way to dissuade a child from harmful behavior is through firm guidance that a child understands and takes seriously. The only way to stop cheating is to tell children that it's wrong, to explain why, and to enforce the sanctions rigorously. The only sex education programs that work—that result in *less* rather than *more* risky sexual activity—are programs that stress abstinence.

Conveying "do nots" to children is key to successful character education, but it is only part of the story. Character education must have a positive side, a call to serve others and to dedicate oneself to a higher purpose. In the long run, **it is a sense of inspiration that will sustain the child's good character, often making the learned prohibitions unnecessary.**

Charitable work is one way to introduce students to a larger purpose. Another is through expressions of religiosity. One great blow against character education in our time has been the virtual banning of religious sentiment from the public schools. In earlier days, schoolbooks and lessons were full of nonsectarian religious ideas, and children benefited from the uplifting values that these ideas conveyed. It is time to open our schools once again to free expressions of faith, the spiritual underpinning of character development.

— William Damon

Paid for by the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

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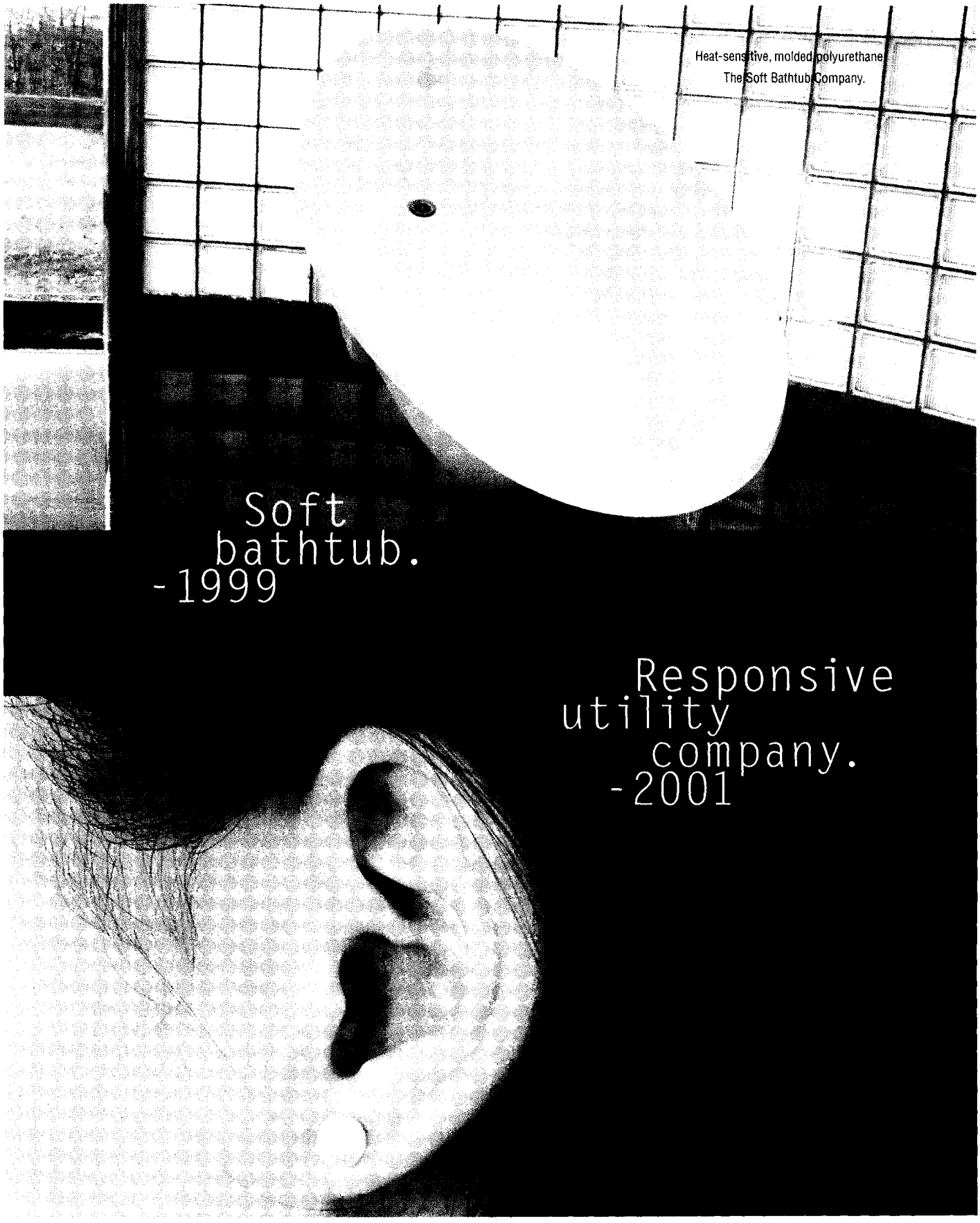

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